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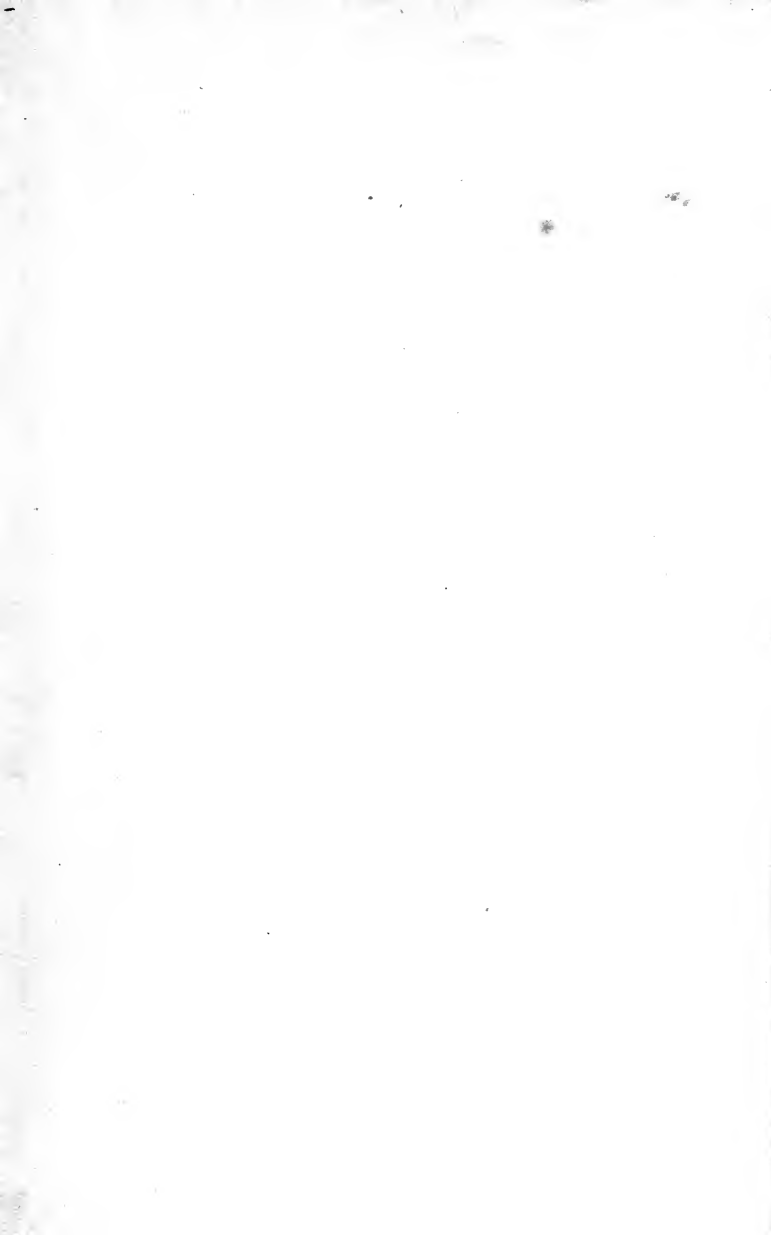
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No. 2.

ONE PENNY.

**FREE TRAPPER'S
PASS.**



JACKSON'S NOVELS

JAMES JACKSON.

2 Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, London. E.C.

Published as "The Gold Seeker's

Darlings" Gold Canyon Novels

FREE TRAPPERS' PASS;

OR,

The Gold-seeker's Daughter!

CHAPTER I.

THE RAID OF THE BLACKFEET.

ON a tributary of the Yellowstone River, and near to the Bighorn Mountains, there stood, at the time our story opens, a cabin. Though roughly constructed, there was an air of nicety and comfort about it, which could hardly be expected in a frontier log-house. On the outside, the walls presented a comparatively smooth surface, though a glance would be sufficient to satisfy one that the work was of the axe and not of the plane. On the inside, the walls seemed to be plastered with a material, which, in its primitive state, resembled stiff brown clay; and it was through a chimney of the same substance that the smoke of the fire within found vent.

A fair girl stood in the shadow of the rude doorway. Her hair, golden as the memory of childhood's days, floated in soft ringlets over her exquisitely-formed shoulders, half concealing in its wavy flow her lovely cheeks, mantling with the rich hue of life—cheeks which, long ago, might have been tinged with the sun's brown dye, but which now, miracle though it might seem, bore little trace of old Sol's scorching hand, or tell-tale mark of western marches. Blue eyes she had, and a lovely light lingered in their liquid depths, while her form was one corresponding to her face, slender, but lithe and springing, well calculated to endure, along with a stout heart, the privations which must come upon one thus so strangely out of place.

Half turning, she threw up one beautiful arm, and with her hand shaded her eyes from the glare of the sun, at the same time glancing to the right. As she did so, she gave a slight start, for, in the distance, she had caught sight of an approaching horseman. As cause for fear was, however, quickly removed, as she almost immediately recognized him as a friend. Murmuring lightly to herself:

"Ah, John Howell! What can he be after?" She watched with some interest his onward progress. Why was it that he so suddenly halted? Why did horse and rider remain mute and motionless, gazing in the direction of a mound which lay not far distant from the cabin?

From behind its concealing shade, with a horrid yell, a band of Indian braves at least fifty in number, in single file approached.

The majority of the band came directly toward the house, but the form of Howell, stationed, sentinel like, upon the crest of a knoll, having been speedily observed, a squad of four well-mounted and well-armed braves dashed toward him at full speed.

Half the intervening distance had been traversed before the trapper—for such was the white man—had fully determined whether their advance was friendly or hostile in its nature. When at length he caught fuller glances of their forms, it was with remarkable celerity that he unslung his rifle and brought it to bear upon the nearest of the advancing foes, tersely exclaiming:

"Blackfeet, by mighty!"

At the touch of the finger upon the trigger the weapon was discharged, and he who had been the mark, fell. Without waiting to see the success of his shot, Howell turned his horse and struck the heavy Mexican spurs deep into his sides, speeding in hot haste over the rolling ground, with the three red-skins following in close pursuit.

While these things were transpiring, the main body was marching steadily toward the cabin. Simultaneously with the report of Howell's rifle, the band halted in front of the dwelling.

In front, mounted before a sturdy-looking brave, was a noble-looking white man. Although his hands were tied, yet from time to time they had not scorned to eye him with anxious glances, seemingly fearful that by some Sampsonian attempt he might free himself. Thus, when the party halted, men closed around him, upon either side, guarding against such a catastrophe.

The young girl still stood in the shadow of the door, with the fairy hand shading her eyes; but her face was pale as ashes, and her heart must have throbbed at whirlwind speed, to have corresponded with the way in which her bosom rose and fell. It was very sudden. A single horseman in sight, and he a friend; then to see in a moment more a half a hundred yelling savage foes! For a moment she looked at them, but, as her gaze rested on the captive, she raised the other arm, and stretching forth both, feebly cried:

"Father!" then slowly sunk to the floor.

The prisoner, too, caught sight of the girl, and with a violent wrench sought to free himself from his bands. Strong as is a father's love, the cords of the savage proved yet stronger, and he found himself, perforce, compelled to act as best suited his captors. They, evidently fearing something of an ambushade, were slow to enter, and with weapon poised with eager eyes, they glanced through the open door. Finding that their fears had no foundation, they dismounted, even allowing and assisting their captive to once more set foot upon the ground. At this close approach the girl somewhat revived. First consciousness of existence came back, then recollection, then strength, and she sprung to her feet, rushed between the two Indians who led the van, and throwing her arms around the neck of her father, exclaimed:

"Father, father! What does this mean? Why are you thus a captive?"

In the background, gazing with a look half inquisitive, half scowling upon these two, was a man, who, though dressed in the garb of the tribe, and his cheek deep tinged by exposure, still gave evidence of being of the white race. He was a short, stoutly-built man, of perhaps thirty years of age. His hair, dressed in the Indian style, was black, eyes small, and set deeply in his head, and the brow, though broad, was low and retreating. From some cause, the end of his nose was wanting, and this, with the wide and disproportionate shape of his mouth tended to heighten the outlandish expression of his physiognomy.

Toward this person did Major Robison—the captive—turn his eye, and, raising as best he could, his bound hands, pointed with them, at the same time saying, bitterly:

"For this, I may thank you, you renegade, Tom Rutter. It was through his means I was taken; and now that it is done, let him take good care of himself, else I may be speedily avenged."

"Look a-hear," interrupted the man thus addressed, a dark scowl sweeping over his brows, "I don't care about havin' you or yer daughter; ain't no interest of mine; 'twon't do me no good. It am accordin' to orders. I don't know as they wants *you* partiklar bad either. Whatever they wants, they're goin' to hev—you hev to go 'long now; and when yer free to locomote again, by-and-bye, we squar accounts. Don't go to sayin' hard words agin me an' them red-skins, if you don't want to be purty effectually rubbed out. Jist keep a cool, civil tongue in that ar head o' yours, make yer tracks in the right manner, and you'll fare well."

Major Robison, considering that to bandy words at that time would be dangerous and effect nothing, turned to his daughter, and in a low tone inquired what had become of her brother, Hugh. The answer was given in an equally low voice.

"He left me but a short time ago, for a ride across the plains. I know not what else he had in view; but I much fear that he will return before our raiders leave, and so fall into their hands."

"Never fear for Hugh. If he is mounted, and with weapons in his hands, the fleetest horseman in the tribe could scarce overtake him in a day."

As Robison stated, it did not seem to be the intention of the Blackfeet to remain here long. But a short space of time was occupied in ransacking the dwelling, and as they emerged, bearing in their hands whatever of desirable plunder they had been able to find, Tom Rutter, who seemed to have, in some sort at least, the command of the expedition, addressed them in words which, if rendered into English, would read:

"I tell you we must be making tracks out of this. We have been successful in our undertaking, but we must not trust to a run of good luck. You understand Blackfeet, what we want the prisoners for. It is for your good more than mine, and they must be taken care of. The girl can't be expected to walk, so one of the braves can take her on his horse. If we had time, we might scout around to find the other young one; but, as we have not, and as he is not necessary, let us be moving at once."

If this was Rutter's opinion, it appeared to coincide with that of the chiefs who stood around, and preparations were accordingly made to start immediately. Then, with a yell of triumph, the line of march was formed, the captives occupying the middle of the file.

As they wound their way around the clump of trees which lay at the distance of a few hundred yards from the late site of her residence, Adelia saw, nearly half-a-mile away, standing on a small elevation, John Howell. He had led his pursuers in a half circle, and having escaped for the time from their range of vision, was evidently bent on discovering what course the Blackfeet intended to pursue with regard to their prisoners. Turning her eye from him, it fell upon a moving object coming over the plain in a direct line toward them. The Indians, too, saw this object, which, it could be easily discerned, was a horseman, riding at a quick rate. A halt was made for a moment, and the renegade, who rode immediately in advance of the captives, half turned on his saddle, and said:

"That ar' person comin' is yer son, Hugh, an' ef he comes a little closer, he'll rush right into our arms. I ain't got nothin' agin ye myself, but it does seem as though luck was down on yer family to-day."

The bad luck of the family, however, seemed to be partly averted, for, fortunately, the young man had a companion. This person gave token that he was an old *voyageur* on the plains; for his eye, ever on the alert, quickly caught sight of the hollow and the savages therein. Their horses were held in, a long survey taken, and then, to all appearance, satisfied that, for the present, no good could be done by them, the two turned to one side, and pushed their steeds into a quick gallop. About the same time, the detachment which had started in pursuit of Howell, again caught sight of him, and, fired by their success, rode at a sweeping pace toward his station. He, casting a last look at the smoke of the burning cabin—plainly visible from his position—another at the captives, and a third at his pursuers, commenced a rapid flight.

Nothing now remaining for the war-party to mark with their devastating hand, they fell again into file, and marched on under the guidance of Rutter.

Signals had been made to recall the men who were in pursuit of Howell, but their signals, in the excitement of their chase, had not been seen. Perhaps if they had been, they would not have been noticed. One of their number had fallen, and his death demanded vengeance. The scalp of the white man must hang in the belt of a Blackfoot.

The pursued took the chase coolly, carefully managing a horse that already seemed somewhat tired, he lifted him at every stroke, keeping sharp watch that he was not gained upon, and evidently steering for some place of refuge.

A long way off appeared the course of a stream, stretching its slowly winding length from south to north. Directly ahead lay a small, but thickly-studded copse of trees. Could the white man see what lay behind or within it?

There was another cabin there, not very large, but strongly constructed, and just at the edge of the copse, peering anxiously over the plain, a young man of

some twenty four years of age. Tall, well-proportioned, with dark-brown hair, and piercing grey eyes, he made no bad appearance as he stood there, holding in his hand a white-brimmed sombrero, garnished with a deep black plume.

"It is time," he was murmuring, "that Howell came. He has been gone long, and it is not often he delays beyond the appointed hour, yet—ha! Yonder he comes, and comes right gallantly, though his horse seems weary. By heavens! horsemen are following him—Indians at that." He needs my aid, for three to one is too long an odds, even for him."

So saying, the young man snatched up his rifle, which was resting against a tree near by, and threw himself upon his ready saddled steed, making the best of his way out of the thicket, starting at reckless speed in the direction of his friend and the three pursuers.

The Blackfeet, seeing a mounted man emerge from the thicket, though the distance was full half-a-mile, partly drew in their animals, as if fearing an ambuscade; then, seeing that no one else appeared, they rushed on with an increased fury. The five men, thus triply divided, were gradually approximating, but the red-skins seemed likely to overtake their intended victim before his friend could come to his assistance; and this likelihood appeared to be reduced to a positive certainty, as the horse of Howell stumbled, rose, and then sank in its track, completely blown. His rider was instantly on his feet, and facing the foes, now within fifty yards of him, and coming on at a rate which must, in a minute more, have brought them to the spot where he stood. But the hardy northern trapper is not a man who shrinks from danger, nor does his courage fail him at a critical period. Howell was one who, in all his eventful career, had never allowed his heart to falter, or his hand to shake. His movements, to be sure, were quick, but not hurried, as he brought his deadly rifle to his shoulder. A careful aim, the trigger was pulled—a flash, a report, and then, with an half-uttered yell, the foremost of the three persons wildly threw up his arms, reeled, pitched heavily off his saddle, and fell with a dull thud to the ground.

The comrades of him who had fallen seemed scarcely to notice the fact, and only hastened on with greater eagerness in order that they might come upon their quarry whilst his rifle was discharged.

Howell gave a rapid glance over his shoulder. His friend, at a furlong's distance, had halted. It formed a perfect picture. The sun rode high in the heavens above the great mountains of the west. In the shade, with the woods and the mountains for a background, his horse motionless, the young man looked keenly through the deadly sights of his long rifle. In front of him, with the broad light of the afternoon streaming over their wild forms, came the swooping braves. The whip-like crack of the rifle broke the charm. Perhaps it was a chance shot, but one of the Indians fell, the leaden messenger of death passing through his heart. Immediately afterwards a crushing blow, dealt by the butt of Howell's gun, swept the third and last of the party from his horse. Half stunned, as he was, he was on his feet in a moment. Bounding towards his white antagonist, he seized him before he had time to draw a weapon, and a confused hand-to-hand encounter ensued. Both fell to the ground, and, tightly clasped in each other's embrace, rolled over and over. The savage accompanied his work with frantic shouts and cries, but the white man held his teeth firm clenched, and in fierce silence essayed to end the contest. Nor was it of long continuance. An arm was suddenly raised, there was a shimmer and a flash of steel, a muffled cry, then the hunter shook himself loose, rose to his feet, took his tired horse by the bridle, and then he walked toward the grove of trees and the cabin before mentioned.

The half-mile which was now to be accomplished was soon passed over, and, as the space in front of the cabin was entered, to the traveller's delight, a fire was seen, with long strings of juicy meat suspended over it, whilst the coffee-pot, that article ever present at the true *voyageur's* meal, bubbled and sang a merry strain of welcome.

The repast was now prepared, and though Howell ate with gusto, yet, with a

touch of that taciturnity which at times is visible in men of the wilds, he refused to utter a word. At length, when the repast was over, he raised himself from the floor, on which he had been reclining, and took a long, earnest, and sweeping glance over the plain. Then, returning, he took his former position, and opened a conversation with his companion.

"Wavin' Plume, I was down the river to-day, and turned aside to get orders from the major."

"Well, what did you see? I've been waiting for you to speak. It looks like danger; yet, if there had been danger you would have spoken."

Without moving from his seat, Howell pointed over to where the bodies of the dead Indians lay.

"Take it in a bunch, Charley, though it's mighty rough. The cussed Blackfeet has bin on a fight with the Crows, and comin' back they just burned the Major's cabin, and gobbled up him and his darter, nice as you choose."

As if waiting until he had taken in, and digested the whole of this intelligence, Waving Plume sat silently for a brief time, staring at his companion. Then, leaping to his feet, he exclaimed:

"Saddle your horse, quickly! We must have some token here for the boys, if they come in to-morrow, as they ought to, and then start in pursuit. Linked in, as we are, with Robison, no question of odds can for a moment allow us to think of deserting him and his daughter. We can follow close on them, Hawkins can hurry his men along our trail, and we may be able to attack them before they reach their village."

"It ain't no use to get in a flurry. My animal won't be fit to start for a couple of hours yet, and I always was in favour of taking things cool. Saddle your horse, though, get your traps ready, leave your signal; and when you're in the saddle, I guess Jack Howell won't keep you too long awaiting."

As they could not start for several hours, all their preparations were made with deliberation. Their saddles were first examined, every strap and thong undergoing a close scrutiny. Next their arms were inspected, and those things which might be necessary to them while following the trail, were brought out from the cabin. A moderate supply of provisions, prepared to keep, a canteen for water, a small flask of liquor, a rifle, a pistol, a blanket, and a hunting-knife comprised the equipment of each. With these, and a sufficient stock of ammunition, the hardy hunters and trappers would willingly strike out upon the surface of the broad prairie, or into the deep recess of the rugged mountains, though stirred only by the prospect of a small pecuniary compensation. Having these, the reader may suppose that the two would hardly hesitate as to the course which they were to pursue, when urged on by a strong friendship and a stern sense of duty—and, with one of the two, a still tenderer sentiment.

Howell led the horses out of the thicket, and stood waiting for his companion.

"Come on, Archer! We mustn't lose too much time or the scent 'll cold. The black rascals has got a good start on us now, and the sooner we wipe that out the surer we'll be about our job."

"Wait a little," was the reply. "We must leave a note here for Ned and his party, telling him what is up, and what we intend. The Crows, too, if they make any pursuit, will doubtless send a runner here, so that it will be well to show them the direction in which they can find us."

"Yer right about that last, though I didn't think of it afore. As for Ned, what'll ye bet he won't be on the trail, and closer up than us by to-morrow mornin'?"

With the touch of a good amateur artist, Charles Archer—or Waving Plume, as he had been named, from the feather that, through storm or shine, floated from his sombrero—was busily engaged sketching on the rough door of the little house; and the bit of charcoal was sufficient to convey a rude, but significant hint to the eyes of any beholder. A pair of feet, as black as soft coal could make them, and an arrow pointing in a northward direction.

Simple as this appeared, yet it was abundantly sufficient for the purpose. The Crows, if they saw it, would understand at a glance, that the trappers were not only aware of the presence of the Blackfeet, but had also gone in pursuit. In fact, this idea struck Howell rather forcibly, for he remarked:

"There you are! If Ned comes in, he can understand that without any spectacles at all, and so kin the Injuns, if they come to get our help, which they couldn't if it was writin'."

CHAPTER II.

THE STRATAGEM OF THE TRAPPERS.

With the privilege of the romancer, let us transfer the reader to a spot some thirty miles distant from the locality mentioned in the preceding chapter. It is a beautiful place. On the west the mountain, on the east and south the plains, on the north a spur of hills running out from the original chain. Here vegetation flourished, and the sweet breath of nature was fresh and dewy. Trees and flowers, and green grass, and sparkling streams greeted the eye, and the soft undertone of winds and waters, so like to silence itself, rang soothingly in the ear.

Hard by a spring of clear water, which bubbled out from under the huge trunk of a fallen tree, a small body of men were encamped around the smouldering embers of the fast-dying fire, on which they had prepared their evening meal. That duty having been disposed of, and their horses seen to, they were, after the manner of their class, engaged in a talk. The subject, too, which claimed their attention, was one of more importance than mere calculations as to peltries, or the ordinary run of camp-fire stories.

"I tell you," said one, the youngest, apparently, of the company; "I tell you that's the trail of a party of Blackfeet on the war-path. You kin see that with half an eye."

"I don't know," chimed in another. "It's nigh into fifteen years since I first crossed this here region, and I calculate that them resembles Injins tracks, an' made by a crowd it 'ud be cussed onhandy for us to meet. They're bent on mischief, and we'd better outen the fire and make a clean break, for we can't tell how many of 'em may be about."

"The Biting Fox is right," said a voice, which seemed to come from their very midst.

Instantly the whole party leaped to their feet, and, with surprise pictured on their faces, gazed in the direction from which the voice proceeded. Right by their fire stood a man, tall of stature, and apparently of the Crow nation. In full war-paint he stood, leaning on his rifle, and gazing intently upon the hunters.

"The Biting Fox is right, for the train is of the Blackfeet. Their number is large, and their blood is warm, for they seek the scalps of the Crows. Three suns ago they passed here; to-night they will return—Antonio waits for them. The fair-haired daughter of the great white Medicine may be with them, and they will pass quickly: but the rifle is long, and the eyes of the young eagles are sharp. Will they wait for them?"

"Yer right," shouted Biting Fox, leaping to his feet. "They'll pass the Major's house, sure as death, an' ef Wavin' Plume an' his chummy ain't along here on their trail, I'll never look through sights agin."

"The white men will need all help. The two braves may come, and the warriors of the great Crow tribe will press hard on behind them, for they are very brave."

The person whom we introduced as the first speaker had been viewing Antonio rather curiously for some time, and now, with a half-puzzled sort of tone, he asked:

"Look-a here, I've got two questions to ask—how did that ar log git thar, an' how did you happen to be in it? Ef you had a bin one of the sneakin' cusses as made that trail you could a knocked both of us over before we could a knowed whar the shots come from."

"The Great Spirit placed the tree there—three suns ago I was here at the spring, when the dogs of the Burnt Stick came, and I crawled into the tree to hide from them. While they were at the spring I heard their plans, and to-night I waited for them to return. I was sleeping, but awoke at the sound of your talking."

This conversation, carried on by two of the party, reassured, as it was intended to do, the rest; and, satisfied that the half-breed was a man to be trusted, they were ready to enter into a discussion as to what was to be done. One of the first things to decide was as to the probable course which the Blackfeet would pursue. Should they come by this route, would they be likely to have in the possession either the Major or his daughter? If these questions were answered affirmatively, what was to be done?

The discussion was short but harmonious. Only one feeling was manifest—to attempt a rescue. Thus it was that Ned Hawkins—a sharp-witted and experienced hunter, who had command of the men—having spent some little time in thought, and some little more in conversation with Antonio, announced his determination.

Hawkins threw himself upon his horse, making a signal for the men to mount and follow. Without questioning the propriety of his move, they obeyed, and all set out in the direction—nearly at right angles with the trail—of the nearest encampment of the Crows. They held on this course for some distance, until the bed of a stream was reached, and then forward for a few hundred yards, till the hoofs of the horses struck upon hard ground, pointed out by the half-breed, and over which it would be difficult to trace them. Taking, at length, a bend over this, they returned to the stream at some distance from the spot where they had previously crossed it. Halting at the stream, the leader made a sign for the rest to stop, and at the same time taking his blanket from its place, behind his back, he dismounted and advanced to the low, shelving bank, and spreading the blanket carefully along the ascent. The blankets of the others were used in like manner, and soon a sort of bridge was made over the grassy turf, upon which the animals were led. Then the hindmost blankets were raised, and placed in front, the horses proceeded a few steps, and the same process was repeated. A few rods thus passed over brought them into their old trail. Along this they hastily galloped, much time had been consumed in the operation, and if the foe should arrive a little before the expected time, their plans might not admit of a full completion.

At the old camping-ground they found Antonio awaiting them; and, by the same means employed at the stream, they began to transfer their horses to the shade of the clump of timber upon their right.

Antonio leading, they soon came into an opening; but, as man after man defiled into it, from the opposite side came a scream, so shrill, so weird and unearthly, that in mute amazement they halted. Silence brooded over the group, touching all with its icy hand. The horses shrunk back with an irrepressible fear, and not a man was there whose thumb did not strike, with startled quickness, the lock of his rifle.

The levelled pieces were let drop into the hollow of their hands, and Hawkins turned to Antonio with:

"I've heerd tell o' this critter often, an' I've seed him myself, twice afore, but I never heerd, and I never knowed of his gettin' that close to a man without tryin' to git closer. They're an ugly brute, an' I believe I'd sooner try a rough an' tumble with a grizzly hisself. What does it mean?"

"It's a sign," responded the half-breed.

The men threw themselves down, to await in patience the expected arrival. The trapper, who, on the first apparition of Antonio, had recognized him, was disposed to continue the conversation. Some few words passed, and then the question was asked as to what time the Indians might be expected.

"An hour yet. The horses of the Blackfeet will be wearied; but, when the moon rises, their scouts will be at the spring. If my white brethren had been

unwarned, they might have been seen. Then they would have travelled fast. The golden-haired would have been mounted on a swift horse; the road to their land is but short, and a young squaw, given to the Great Spirit, is never seen again."

"Right, my mighty! You know the red varmints like a book."

Ned Hawkins, meantime, had been diligently watching the horizon, straining his eye-sight in the endeavour to discover something to repay him for his trouble. Now, more through surprise than the fear of the presence of an enemy, he uttered a warning.

"Sh!" On the plain a long line of dark, moving forms could be seen coming on at a fast pace. There was sufficient light to show to the breathless watchers that they were Indians; but to what tribe they belonged could not be told until they drew nearer, or the moon should fully rise. There was, however, but little doubt in the minds of the trappers that they were the expected enemy. The story of the half-breed had been so far verified.

As they filed, one after another into full view, and no signs of prisoners could be seen, the half-breed shook his head in an unsatisfied manner, while Hawkins said, in a whisper:

"Prairie Wolf, I allow yer sharp in Injun matters an' death on black critters, but you've mistook the thing this time, an' run us inter a purty snarl asides. 'Thar's only about twenty of the red-skins, an' nary a prisoner."

"Antonio was right. The band was twice as large when it passed, three suns ago."

"Ef yer right, it beats me," put in Stevens, in a gruff, but low tone; "only one way to clear it up. They've been whipt like thunder, an' consequently ther in a bully flame of mind for rubbin' us out, if they once get the scent."

"If the pale-faces will wait till they are settled, they shall learn why but half of these who went returned. They look not like men who have been beaten."

"Waal, I allow it might be some sort o' a consideration to know about them things, but then, as the Major 'pears safe, there's other things nearer home to look at."

This speech, notwithstanding the important facts which it contained, was somewhat dangerous to their safety, for Biting Fox, the speaker, had incautiously let his voice rise to a very loud whisper. Accordingly, Antonio expressed his opinion on the question of "what's to be done" by admonishing silence.

"Ef we were squaws, who talk, we might be in danger; but we are men who fight, and do not talk. Antonio will creep up to their camp, and hear what they say."

No dissenting voice was raised to this proposition, and he departed with that quick an stealthy step, for which the aborigines of our country have been so noted. So weird-like was his motion that he seemed like a ghost flitting through the trees. When he reached the edge of the copse he disappeared entirely.

When the scout had crept up within hearing distance of the encampment, he redoubled his caution. Advancing like a serpent, he felt well around before he drew his body forward, fearful that something might lie in his path, which, giving forth a sound, might herald his approach. Long practice in this kind of work enabled him to advance noiselessly to within a few yards of the nearest group, where, sheltered by the already mentioned trunk of the fallen tree, he could easily understand their conversation. The halt was a temporary one, but a number of the braves, tired by their long journey, had sunk to sleep, only four or five, apparently, being yet awake. These, engaged in a conversation as earnest as would be consistent with their savage dignity, were stationed nearest to the cover which concealed the hunters. All of them appeared to be chiefs of some importance.

Antonio remained in his position near a quarter of an hour; then, having learned those things which he wished to know, sought to retrace, unobserved.

his steps. This he succeeded in doing, and, just as the hunters were becoming anxious, on account of his prolonged absence, he stood in their midst.

"Waal, what did yer make out?" was the anxious inquiry.

"Antonio was right. The white chief and the young squaw, his daughter, are prisoners. Those who have the two followed another trail, but they will meet each other at the great crossing of the Yellowstone River. These, at the spring, have the scalp of the Crow at their girdle, and the Prairie Wolf would fight them for revenge."

Even as the half-breed was speaking, the four Indians in council raised themselves from the ground, swiftly wending their way to the spring. Standing there for a moment, they cautiously set out on the trail which had been made. As the form of the last brave was lost to view, Ned Hawkins whispered, in a meaning tone:

"We're in for it now, boys! Yer can't blind old Eagle-eye, nor yer can't run away. It'll be a fightin' matter, an' it ar a blessin' that half them varmints are sleepin'. Don't fire unless they're right atop of you, or gin the yell. Then fight like grizzly bears or catamounts. Ef yer don't, yer hair will be riz, sure."

"What do you think, Wolf?" queried Biting Fox.

He, thus addressed, quietly shook his head for an answer, making a gesture indicative of doubt.

"Yer in doubt. Now I allows it ar a doubtful subject, an' if—hillo! Fire an' yer a dead Injin!" whispered he, in a stern, low voice, at the same time bringing his rifle in line with the heart of Antonio, who, regardless of their dangerous position, was aiming in the direction of the Blackfeet camp.

The movement and address of Biting Fox recalled him to his senses, and, carefully letting fall the muzzle of his gun, he pointed to a dark object, dimly to be seen creeping slowly along toward the thicket, and, in a voice even lower than he had formerly used, he whispered:

"That is Talmkah."

With a sagacity all their own, the Indians had divined that the whites had taken refuge in the thicket. Moreover, it was patent that from the care which they had exercised, and the time occupied in the movement, that they did so with the intention of watching them—perhaps of making an attack if a favour able moment presented itself.

The half-breed turned to the hunters.

"Prairie Wolf will go fall upon Talmkah. If he can meet him the chief shall die, and know not the hand that struck him. If it fails, let the white men ride straight through the camp, and they will escape. Fear not for Antonio—he can take care of himself. If the great braves of the Crows and the white trappers do not rescue the prisoners before, we will meet at the Great Crossing."

Before nay could be said, he was gone. Five minutes passed as an age, and there was a wild, fierce yell; two figures arose from the ground, then fell again, writhing together in a desperate, deadly encounter. Quick as thought the score of warriors were on their feet, and rushing toward their horses. As they rose, five steeds, with their five riders close clinging, charged madly out of the thicket, and bore down upon the confused mass. With a volley from their fire-arms, the horsemen dashed through them, and several of the savages fell. Before the Indians could bring their arms to bear, they were comparatively useless, for the whites were out of range.

A cry from the throat of Antonio brought them to their senses. The grasp of Talmkah had slipped, and his antagonist drove home his knife. Then a piercing whistle rang out, so shrill and loud that Ned Hawkins, at the distance of a quarter of a mile, turned in his saddle. As the last sound of the note died away from the shrubbery, with crash and tear, came a coal-black mustang, dashing for the spot where the single combat had taken place. Then Antonio separated from his antagonist, and threw himself upon his horse. One more cry of exulta-

tion, and he rode recklessly over the plain, coal-black mustang and stout-limbed brave vanishing from sight of both friend and foe.

"Anybody hurt?" was the first query, after the trappers were out of gunshot.

"Nary one," said Bill Stevens.

"Blessin's don't come single-handed. Got out o' the durned scrape easier than I 'spected. An' the half-breed, who are el'ar grit, 'cordin' to all appearances, will save his scalp, too. Meanwhile, what are we to do? stay here, striko for head quarters er foller 'em on?"

A little conversation, a few questions as to route and distance, and then, with a hardy assurance, the hunters struck across the broad prairie. Now along its level surface, now through thin belts of timber, or clumps of bushes; again over undulating mounds and through the beds of numberless summer streams which lay in their way, they ceaselessly pursued their course. Every sign which lay in their way was instinctively noted as they flitted by, and, by long practice, they could see far around them.

For several hours they travelled on, until the moon seemed nearly ready to sink behind the mountains, which lay off and away to the west. Noticing this, Biting Fox partly drew rein, and remarked:

"I should calkerlate that it war time, nigh about, to stop. We haven't so very many more miles ahead, an' ef we should happen to cross the trail too soon, we don't do any good, an' mebbe a sight o' bad. The hosses ar a leetle blowed; here's a good place to rest 'em, so I'm in fur holdin' up."

"All right," responded Hawkins, and the party halted.

As they did so the moon dropped quietly behind a black cloud, and, for a few moments, they were left in nearly total darkness.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTIVES.—FRIENDS ON THE ALERT.

Wearily passed the day to the captives; when night came down there seemed no sign of cessation from the toilsome march. On, still on, the column kept its way, until it was only an hour or so before midnight, that the savages gave signs that their resting-place was nigh. Then some of the younger braves began to stretch their wearied limbs, while Rutter looked eagerly around, striving, through the darkness, to see the various landmarks with which he was familiar. Though the renegade had said but little during the afternoon and evening, yet he ever rode near to the prisoners, keeping a watchful eye upon them. Now, as they came to a huge boulder, around which they were compelled to make a circuit, he ventured to inform the Major that they were near the end of the day's journey, and that they would soon encamp for the night.

This intelligence, welcome as it was, elicited no remark from the captives.

At length the foremost of the file of warriors uttered a not unmusical grunt, expressive alike of satisfaction and intelligence. They were in a small timbered bottom, admirably suited for an encampment. It was toward this spot they had been aiming, through their hurried march.

Thomas Rutter, however, was not the first man to take advantage of the location. A party of red-men had evidently remained on the spot for some time, and the lodges which they had occupied were standing in a good state of preservation. One of the best of these Rutter immediately set apart for the reception of the captives. Two other huts remained, rather larger in size, though hardly as well constructed. These were made the headquarters of the chiefs; the braves were compelled to take up with beds on the bare ground, the sky their only roof.

After these dispositions had been made, Rutter sought out one of the older chiefs, and held an earnest consultation with him. During the course of the conversation, glances were more than once cast towards the hut, and then across the dimly lighted prairie. Pursuit was evidently feared, and the white man was asking the opinion of the chief, whether it would be safe, under the circumstances,

to build a small fire. For some reason, best known to themselves, it was important that the Major and his daughter should be brought, safe and sound, to the land of the Blackfeet, and in order that this might be done, Rutter insisted that they should have some refreshment after eight hours travel without rest or food.

"The white brave may do as he pleases," was the response of the red-man.

When Rutter entered the cabin, bearing a meal, plain, of course, and such as western men and western women are obliged to be content with, but abundant and substantial, there was actually an expression of benevolence on his countenance.

It is supposed by some that sorrow destroys the appetite. If such be the case, then were the prisoners not at grief's lowest depth, for they did ample justice to the renegade's preparations. Perhaps it was this that so far softened Robison's heart as to enable him to speak to the man before him.

"Perhaps Rutter," said he, "you can tell me what this thing is going to end in. You know well enough that I never had any difficulty with the tribe of which you are now, I suppose, a member. If every white man had treated the Indians in as fair a manner as I have, there would, or ought to be, a more friendly relation existing between the two races. I never was really in your region but once; and then the only harm done was shooting a deer or two and a grizzly. According to the best of my knowledge, no Blackfoot's eye fell on me from the time I entered until the time I left their hunting-grounds."

"Waal, Major, yer c'mencing to talk kind o' sensible. I got nothin' agin ye, an' wouldn't of myself a hurt ye; but I had my orders. If yer done as ye say, yer won't be hurt, ner yer darter neither; if yer didn't, it'll be apt to be rough for both. I don't want yer bad will, but what I done was all on account o' justice."

"I don't really understand what you mean, but, if the tribe thinks I ever did it wrong, they are greatly mistaken. Can you give me any idea of the matter?"

"You'll find that out soon enough. I got orders not to tell yer anything, but ye kin calculate on yer darter's life bein' safe, anyhow."

"Thank Heaven for that. For myself I do not care. What I have done, I have done for her and her brother—her brother is safe; if she remains so, I am satisfied."

The inside of the lodge presented a wild and picturesque appearance. Rutter was standing near the entrance, and the light from the torch which he held in his hand fell full upon his curiously-shaped head, bringing it out in all its strange oddity. The girl, young and fair, half reclined on a bed of skins, which formed part of the spoils of the Blackfeet in their late foray. The third one of the party stood in the shadow, so that his face could not be clearly seen, and his voice, when he spoke, was low and guarded.

"One more word with ye, Major," continued Tom. "Don't try to run away, fur you can't do it. If ye do, I won't be responsible fur yer safety. A chance shot in the dark sometimes goes home."

"I make no promises, but so long as success seems improbable, I will not attempt anything of the kind."

"Thar ar' one thing. Ef ye git clar out o' this it'll be the best thing that could o' happened to ye. It'll pay."

Muttering over the words, "it'll pay," he stuck the torch in a crevice, and left the lodge.

Stillness reigned within the rude cabin, and in half-an-hour father and daughter were buried in a profound sleep.

Outside all was silent. At different places around the camp, sentinels were placed—four in all—but these gave no cry, standing mute and grim, their forms scarcely to be distinguished in the dim gloom of night.

For some hours nothing of importance occurred, though the fleecy clouds scudding across the heavens were drawing more closely together, moved in darker and thicker procession. The wind, too, came sweeping along with a moist and deep sound, that foretold an approaching storm. These threatening appear-

nances could scarce escape the observation of the outposts, and their experienced eyes had clearly foreseen that a rain gust was fast coming.

The red-skins were not the only ones who foresaw the approaching storm. Hawkins and his party, some two miles distant, looked dubiously about, and making the best of an apparently bad bargain, prepared, in the absence of shelter, to submit to a drenching. Not exactly knowing in what place they were, they did not think of turning their footsteps in the direction of the deserted lodges, though they had doubtless been seen by some, if not all, of them.

"I say, Ned," muttered Biting Fox, "ef the Major an' his darter is dragged through this here rain, we mont as well pull horses an' take back track. She won't be likely to git over it; an' ef one goes under you can bet the other will too."

"Wait till it rains, will ye," was the rather surly response. "Ef it rains hard forgit sights if they don't find cover. I hain't voyaged here so many years fur nothin'. I know Injun nature an' Injun luck right up to the handle. Ef the Blackfeet hes the Major an' Adele, an' wants to keep 'em, jist bet yer back load o' pelts, they'll take 'em along slick an' smooth, ef we don't stop 'em."

"Yaa's, that's ther ticket. Mules an' Injuns hev good luck to pay 'em fur the hard licks everybody's bound to give 'em. Meanwhile I wonder, now I'm thinkin' of it, whar's Jake. Nothin' would do him but he must go on a lone scout, 'cause he felt copper-skins in his bones, an' he must er fell in with these 'dential cusses. Wish he was along agin. If he does blow like a tired buffalo, he's some on a fight. Wonder what's become of him?"

"Like enough he's rubbed out," remarked one, and the conversation ended.

But Jake Parsons was alive and well.

In our first chapter, we mentioned that Hugh Robison, when, to the eyes of the eager Indians he made his appearance, was accompanied by a companion, who was none other than Parsons himself.

Jake, by the way, was something of a character—characters are frequently met with in the far West. Though a painter might hope to convey a pretty fair idea of his face; an author could scarce hope to give a respectable description, for, but one distinctive feature could be mentioned, and that was hair. The hair on top of his head was long, but that on his face and chin was, if any thing, longer. A weather-beaten old hat, slouched over the whole, gave him a rather ruffianly appearance, utterly at variance with his real disposition. His voice was by no means unmelodious. As has already been hinted, he was somewhat addicted to "blowing;" but, fighting imaginary battles, as he sometimes did, he was not, for that, any the worse a fighter in the general scrimmage of an Indian melee. Self-reliant and courageous, he cared little for companions, and was willing at any moment to set out upon a trapping excursion into the very heart of the country of a hostile tribe. From such an expedition was he returning, when he fell in with Hugh, and was fortunately with him, when he ran so near a chance of being taken prisoner. Hardly had the excitement of retreat subsided, when the natural feelings of the young man began to find expression, he hardly thought of pursuit. The trapper, on the contrary, took a more philosophical view of the case, and in words well suited for the purpose, cheered up the young man's spirits.

"I tell ye, Hugh, it ain't as bad as it mout be. Neither on 'em's hurt; they have a long journey afore 'em, an' it'll be darned queer ef we can't git 'em out o' bad hands afore they stop. When ye've seen as much as I hev, ye'll not give in so soon to misfortun'!"

"But, what can we two do against so many?"

"Waugh! Don't ye know that Jack Howell has seen 'em, an' that Ned Hawkins will be on the trail afore to-morrow night. They're in camp, not forty miles from here, and will scent the game right away. Ef we foller strait on ahind—we'll be in at the death, sure."

"You know more about such matters than I do, and so I put myself in your hands. Do whatever you think best, and rest assured that I will aid you."

"What do yer make out of that, yonder? It looks to me rather like a rise of smoke, though, they'd hardly be fools enough to light a fire."

"It must be a cloud, and yet—"

"Ef I'm mistaken, why then, may grizzleys eat me. They are a campin' in them old lodges what the Crows left, when they war on a big buff'ler hunt up yender. I know the lay of the land, fust rate, an' ef you stay here, I'll go ahead an' reconnoiter a bit. I can't tell exactly whether we kin do any good, but, I kin, when I see 'em once."

"Remember to be careful. I would be but an infant here, without your advice and assistance."

"In course, I will. I haven't got sich a great desire to 'pear at a Blackfoot burnin', so I'll try to keep a sound scalp for some days to come. Lay low now, an' ef any thing happens, you'll soon know it, an' clear out accordin'."

In less than half-an-hour, the light-treading scout reappeared. He found Hugh standing on the spot where he had left him, though he had dismounted, and was allowing his horse to pick up such nourishment as he could find within reach.

"Waal, Hugh, I kinder guess we can't do much to-night. They are just whar I thought they war, camped in the old lodges. I war in among 'em, an' found the Major war in the middle wigwam; but, as thar war a copper-skin lyin' right acrost the door, I didn't think it advisable to try to git in."

"You say that the prisoners are confined in the middle one of the three lodges, are you certain of this?" anxiously queried the young man.

"Purty much so. That war the one whar the guard war a lyin' acrost the door, an' at the other two, every one war on the inside. But then, thar ar half a dozen or so lyin' around loose, so as it's rather hard to get between 'em all."

"Parsons, my mind is made up; I *will* see my father to-night. I do not entirely expect to rescue him, but I intend to see him, and, if I can, let him know that he has friends near, who will do all in their power to aid him. If I am discovered, I can but give you the same advice which you gave me a few minutes ago, make off in the dark."

Astonishment at this foolhardy proposition for some minutes, as well it might, held the trapper speechless, but he finally recovered his breath sufficiently to exclaim:

"Why, bless yer innocent soul. Yer sure to be took and scalped. If ye had had all the experience in sich matters that I've had, I wouldn't say you couldn't do it, but, I've did it 'onct to-night, an' I swar, I wouldn't try it agin for any money. What 'ud I say to yer father, when he asked me whar Hugh war? D yr think I could tell him I let yer go, an' get killed all for nothin', in a place I wouldn't venture myself?"

"I have no doubt but that you are sincere in what you say, and that I would be acting more prudently, as far as I myself is concerned, if I did not venture; but, I have made up my mind, and go I must, no matter what the consequences are."

Further conversation was carried on, but finally, the trapper, finding that Robison was obstinately bent on going, and alone, reluctantly yielded his consent. He carefully explained how the camp was situated, and the sentinels located, cautioned him about being either too confident, or too timid, and then saw him depart with much solicitude, considering that he stood a very poor chance of ever seeing Hugh again.

"The young 'un," he soliloquized, "comes from a good stock, and a plucky stock. It ain't many of the old 'uns, cren, as would dare to slide into a camp that way. I like the lad; but I'm pleased, somehow, that I ain't along. Ef I war, we'd both loose top-knots, sure."

Working swiftly but silently an opening, sufficiently large to permit his body to pass through, was soon made. With a long look around, in which, he held his breath, and listened intently, Hugh strove to discover whether, by any means, his presence had been suspected. All remained silent, and so he entered.

The smouldering remnants of a torch cast an uncertain light over the objects within, yet it was sufficient to see that the place was tenanted alone by those whom he sought.

Bending tenderly over his father, he looked in the face of the sleeper. Then he touched him on the shoulder, so lightly that it produced no more effect than to cause him to turn partly, and mutter in the uneasy manner of one who is disturbed in his slumbers. Hugh then laid his hand on the shoulder of his father, and giving him a shake, the Major awoke.

An exclamation trembled on his lips as he saw the dusky form at his bedside; but a hand was pressed, for an instant, tenderly but firmly upon his mouth; by the time the hand was removed, Hugh was recognized. The reader may imagine the surprise caused by his unexpected appearance. Both were silent, the young man, anxious to learn what would be his father's opinion concerning his act, the Major because he scarce knew what he ought to say. At length, in a low whisper, the latter spoke.

"Hugh, you grieve me! Misfortunes have come around sufficiently thick without this. You cannot possibly do good by this visit, and it will be a mercy if you can leave without notice. Indeed, how you were able to get here, without raising an alarm, I am unable fully to understand."

"If I could come without being discovered, why may I not go away, and if I can escape, why may not Adele and yourself?"

"Do not count on such good fortune. I look farther ahead, and have a faint hope that all may yet turn out well."

"Will you attempt it?" persistently continued Hugh. "The Indians, with all their boasted cunning, are not infallible, and my being here proves that. You must make up your mind soon, for every moment of delay endangers the success of the attempt."

"Once for all, no!" answered the Major.

"Then I will leave this place, though I will not loose any chance of rescuing you."

The young man silently wrung the hand of his father, and then approached the rude couch of his sister. The torch, which had faintly illuminated the tent on his first entrance, had died out, and barely sufficient light was left to enable him to find his way across the lodge. Hastily he bent down, and pressed his lips to the cheek of the sleeping girl, and then throwing himself upon the ground, he disappeared through the opening.

The heavens were even blacker than before, and the darkness was inky; so dark was it, that the lodges could not be seen at the distance of a yard, and Hugh was in a dilemma as to how he should proceed. Though he could take nearly the same route that he had followed in coming into the encampment, yet he could by no means be certain that he was in the right direction; and a deviation of a few yards might lead him into the arms of the enemy. Revolving in his mind, for a few minutes, the chances of escape, the path he must pursue, and looking behind him, Hugh assumed a stooping posture, and boldly pushed on, resolved to do his best, and, should it come to that, not to allow himself to be taken without a hard fight. His progress was difficult; more than once he felt inclined to re-join that his father had refused to accompany him.

Perhaps two-thirds of the most dangerous part of the way had been passed over when a sound came to his ears, which seemed to be different from any made by wind or weather.

The "ugh" of a sentinel came to the ear of the listener, and then a reply was made, in the shape of a few words spoken—evidently by a different person—in the dialect of the tribe, with which he was but slightly acquainted. A short conversation took place between the two sentinels; the subject of it was the weather. An approaching storm was clearly foreseen, and, as the guard had but lately relieved—while Robison was in the inside of the lodge—and they would consequently be compelled to endure the inclemency of the weather, they seemed to be desirous, if not of seeking shelter, at least to seek solace in tobacco.

This subject being broached, a search was made for the materials, and then a dead silence, which was not of long duration, ensued. Unfortunately, neither of them possessed the desired weed. They listened attentively. No sound could be heard, though but a yard or two from them the heart of a white man beat loud and strong.

The savage with whom Hugh was contending, succeeded in grasping him by the throat. The young man made a fierce lunge with his knife, but it missed its mark, and the hold on his windpipe was gradually tightening. So far, the Indian had had no weapon in his hands; now, with the disengaged arm, he reached for his knife. He felt his physical superiority, and glorified in it.

The storm, which had been for so long rising, reached its culminating point, and now it burst over the encampment with a tenfold violence, on account of its delay. Just as the red-man was concentrating all his energies for a decisive effort, there came a blinding flash of lightning, revealing, with its lurid glare, the three lodges, the group of Indians, and the death-struggle taking place in the clump of bushes.

The grasp on the neck of young Robison relaxed, as the Indian, frightened by the glare of light, for a moment cowered back. That moment was his last. Even as the rolling burst of thunder came, the knife of Hugh Robison went to the hilt into his heart, and the warm life-blood came spurting out in a crimson tide.

"Whoop!" shouted Jake, divining that the thing was done, though he could not see it. "Go it, boys! Pitch into 'em, and hurrah for the Major."

The rain came rushing down, and Jake, bound to do all the damage in his power, discharged his rifle in the direction of the group which he had seen. A wild cry told that the shot had taken effect, and, catching Hugh by the arm, he hurried him away from the spot. Through the trees and underbush, crashing and tearing, the two rushed, the savages, recovered from their momentary panic, and understanding how few was the number of their opponents, following hard in their wake.

"Can you find your way?" hurriedly asked the trapper. "If you can, our best plan is to separate—one of us may escape; but this here way, we're bound to be both of us taken."

"All right! I think I can make it. If you think it's best, cut loose, and take the chances."

"Then here goes," responded Jake, as he turned almost at right angles to their present course, leaving his companion to pursue his way alone.

The distance was but short, and soon he found himself within the limits of their camp, with his hand resting on the bridle of his steed.

"Safe at last!" he cried, and vaulted into his saddle. "Jake can take care of himself. It is a fearful night, but I must leave him; the blood-hounds may strike my track if I delay."

With a cheer, expressive of delight and of defiance, he clapped spurs to his horse's sides, and dashed away through the darkness, leaving his pursuers to give vent to their disappointment in the yells and curses. Tom Rutter listened for a moment, and then shouted out:

"There's another one to look arter. Can't ye tell that by the sound?"

* * * * *

Ned Hawkins and his party, in doubt as to what course they should pursue, were discussing the state of affairs when the first flash of lightning, and its attendant thunder-clap, came. As the rain rushed down, the five drew closer together, sheltering themselves, as much as possible, with their blankets. They had stood perhaps for a quarter of an hour exposed to the pitiless drenching of the rain, when Bill Stevens uttered a low, warning:

"Hush!"

All listened, and the sound of a horse, travelling at full gallop, was distinctly heard.

"By thunder! I ought to know that gallop," whispered Stephens. "If that

ain't the Major's bay mare, then may grizzlies eat me. It can't be that one of them cussed Indians has her. I goes in for hailin' 'em, and see. Ef it's Injaz its all right—we're all near the Major. If it ain't Injun, we're all right anyhow, for it's one of Robison's family."

The stranger was now so near that he seemed to be likely to run right upon them, if they did not give him notice of their presence; accordingly Ned Hawkins hailed him with:

"Who goes thar?"

A sound followed, as though the horse had been thrown violently back on its haunches, and the response came:

"A friend! Who are you?"

"Hurrah!" sang out Bill Stevens; "I know'd I was right. It's Hugh Robison, on the little mare. We're friends, too, so come along this way, and take care you don't stumble over us. What in thunder are you doin' here?"

"I should know that voice," responded Hugh, for it was he; "if I am not mistaken, it is Bill Stevens, and I am glad enough to meet you. But be careful how you talk, for I am not sure but that there is half-a-score of Blackfeet after me. It has been a touch and go."

"Let 'em come—cuss 'em. We let about twenty on 'em keep their scalps to-night of pure marcy; but ef we get another chance, they'll hev to look out. Now can you tell the number of the Indians, and how they are occupied?—in fact, give us all the information possible, as well as your opinion about the success we will probably meet with."

"By making a bold stroke we might succeed in carrying off my father, but as I have just had a conversation with him, I can look at the matter more rationally than you could think. There are twenty-nine of the Blackfeet, besides Tom Rutter, who is as good as three more. The whole camp is alarmed, and it's my opinion that we wouldn't stand a chance with them. My father says that he thiinks they are acting from a motive, in carrying him off, and he has hopes of escaping without having recourse to violence. If it were not for Adele, he would feel perfectly at ease."

"How in thunder did you see him, Hugh? If he war in their hands, it 'ud be next to impossible for a prarie-dog to git in to him without bein' shot, let alone you, who, meanin' no disrespect, never had any experience of scoutin'."

"To tell the truth, it was none of the easiest, but Jake and myself followed the trail all day, and then, when night came, he crawled in on them, and found out how the land lay. I could not stand it, to know that father was so near, and I not to be able to speak to him, so I made him give me the directions, and I struck for the place. I had not much trouble getting in, but it was a near thing with me getting away again; and, as I have not heard anything of Parson's, I'm afraid he has got into difficulty."

"Never mind him. Just you keep cool, and as dry as possible, and by day-break we'll be on the trail; git 'em startled, and there is no such thing as calm-ing 'em down."

The rain still beat down on the party of six, but their heavy blankets were sufficient to shield their ammunition, as well as their persons, from its power, and, though the time hung dully on their hands, morning light soon arrived, the darkness and the rain being driven away very nearly at the same time.

As Hugh Robison had stated, the Indian encampment was in a beautiful state of confusion, the different braves being greatly surprised at the sudden attack—for attack they at first supposed the presence of Hugh and his companion to be. Tom Rutter was the first to understand the true state of affairs. It took but little reflection to show him that Parsons, with one other, constituted the whole force of the invaders. He came to this conclusion from the fact that he had seen the two together but a few hours before, that, if there had been more than one trapper, they would have given a more substantial proof of their presence, and, finally, that the young man would be just the person to make a desperate attempt to rescue his father and sister.

Minute after minute passed by, and the shouts died away, and then the tread of the returning savages was heard. At the moment of deepest excitement, Tom Rutter had not been forgetful of his charge. Returning from the unsuccessful chase of the fugitives, Rutter immediately bent his footsteps in the direction of the prison-house of the Major, desirous of ascertaining, with his own eyes, that his escape had not been effected.

He entered the hut with a brand from which the blaze had been extinguished by the rain, and the few coals remaining on it were crackling and spitting, as he endeavoured to blow them again into a flame.

Half apogetically, Rutter remarked:

"How did that hole git thar? It warn't that last night, an' someone must hev made it."

"You can feel easy, as far as either of us are concerned, for it was made by neither of us," was the response of Robison. "If your guards choose to go to sleep, or permit such things to be done, I am sure the fault is none of mine."

The old chief had followed Rutter, and saw the aperture with as much surprise, although he uttered no exclamation. He remarked to the renegade, in a low tone, and using the Indian dialect:

"The young man has been here, and has entered the lodge. The braves who watched must have slept at their posts. He has come once, and left his mark; next time he will leave a broader one. We must hasten into our own country, where he cannot follow, for I see he is very brave."

"That's so, the whole tribe on 'em is of jist sich a stock, and there's a dozen or more o' trappers, as is clar grit, what'll be arter us as soon as they git wind o' the Major bein' off. Yer ain't safe from them kind o' fellers, even when yer sittin' in yer own lodge. They'd think no more o' shootin' ye than poppin' over a beaver or a buffalo. But we must set a man to watch that thar hole till we start, which, accordin' to my notion, won't be so drefful long."

"Ugh!" said the chief, and the two departed to their lodge; there to wait until the morning dawned.

* * * * *

It was near four o'clock in the afternoon, when a party of six men, clad in the rough garments of trappers, and under the guidance of the redoubtable Ned Hawkins, pushed their jaded horses resolutely into the Yellowstone River; now swollen by the rain of the previous night, to a very respectable stream. They did not cross at the regular fording-place—so frequently used as to have received the specific name of "the Great Crossing;" but, fearful that if they did, their trail would be observed by those from whom they wished it to be concealed—the six struck the stream five or six hundred yards further up. Somewhat wearied and worn with a long march, Hawkins led his little command into the thick clump of oziers, and then, without saying a word, threw himself from his horse, his companions following his example. Scarce ten minutes from the time when the last man appeared, two men might have been seen urging their steeds in the same direction. Hawkins, ever watchful, had observed them when they were at least a quarter of a mile away. The trail, recent and plain, had attracted their attention, and one of the two had dismounted from his horse to examine it. Presently his cap was seen to fly into the air, and he waved his hand, as though he had made a pleasing discovery; then he remounted, and, with his comrade following close by his side, pressed upon the trail, bearing straight for the river, and the clump of oziers.

"Sure as death, thar comes Wavin' Plume and Jack Howell. I thought they'd be makin' in this direction 'fore long," murmured Ned, to his friends, who were engaged in scrutinizing the strangers.

"They're welcome as fair weather! The more the merrier; and if a few more on us turus up we kin jist walk off the Major without sayin' 'by yer leave.'"

Ten minutes more brought Night Hawk and his friend into the centre of the little circle, which stood waiting to receive them. A hearty welcome greeted them, and then one of the men asked:

"How did you come to follow us here? You must have made a straight shot to make such a centre hit."

"I cannot say that it was through my own peculiar sagacity," said Waving Plume. "A ghost, spectre, wizzard, or something of that kind, but looking, however, like an Indian, stumbled upon us while we were roving about last night, and ordered us to be at the Great Crossing before nightfall of to-day. Knowing no other place of that name, my friend and I journeyed in this direction, and here we are."

Almost at the same instant, Waving Plume's eye rested on the same object.

"Here they come," whispered he. "Is it friend or foe, Ned?"

"Could hardly tell at this distance. Might be mistaken, as the half-breed might be comin' with twenty or thirty of the Crows. Rather of opinion, though, that it's Blackfeet; if so, get ready your shootin'-irons, an' loosen yer knives. We'll have one pelt at 'em, anyhow."

Five minutes more and the train were within a few hundred yards of the river—there could be no doubt but that they were the anxiously expected enemy. The moon had not yet risen, but by the starlight their numbers could be easily counted, and it was observed that there were two persons with them, who were evidently white—a man and a woman. It was with difficulty that the cheers, which rose to the lips of the men on recognizing the Major, could be repressed.

"It will never do to attack them before they have crossed," said Hugh Robison. "If we do, the chances are that they run without firing a shot, and if they do, good care will be taken that the prisoners are not left behind."

"That's so, Hugh," replied Hawkins. "Just wait till they hev crossed over, and are mountin' the bank—then pick your marks, and let drive. Be careful you don't hit the prisoners, though, and sallyin' out on the red varmints, kinder take 'em by surprise. We may ride through without trouble, and then agin we mayn't. But you ain't the boys to be scared at the prospects of gettin' a few hard knocks in a scrimmage, and remember, you're fightin' to rescue yer best friends."

This was the speech of the Captain to his army, and its effects was as great as though he had harangued them for an hour; the men looked at their weapons, and then to the leader of the Indian file, who had ridden his horse into the river.

Several minutes passed of intense interest to those ambushed, until the last of the horsemen reached the river bank, and began its ascent. It had been conjectured that the party might stop, for a while, at least, at this spot, but they gave no indications of any such purpose.

With a low-whispered "fire!" Ned Hawkins raised his rifle to his shoulder—the six followed his motion—then came a single, loud, clear-ringing crack, and three of the Indians were seen to drop from their saddles, while two or three others swayed violently in their seats.

The Indian who had been specially appointed to guard Adele had fallen from his seat, struck dead by a chance shot, and the half-fainting girl, though unconstrained, unconsciously clung tightly to the saddle, totally disregarding the cry of Waving Plume to throw herself off.

One of the prisoners was rescued—the other was not. The trappers' work was but half done. Ten Indians lay dead on the plain, and a number of those who escaped had received serious wounds, while none of the whites had been killed. Bill Stevens had received a severe cut on the shoulder, and a blow on the head, but neither wound was mortal; and, though the rest had not all passed through the affray unscathed, yet they were as fit for fighting as when they first entered into the conflict.

The cords which bound the limbs of Major Robison were speedily cut, and his first exclamation, upon being loosed, was:

"My daughter!"

"She is still a captive," was the response of Hawkins; "but we will rescue her to-night or die!"

Vain promises those, which are easier made than kept. When hot the iron, then strike, nor wait a moment. Cool heads will sometimes err, and rashness belongs to all. Thinking their object had been accomplished, the Indians had been pursued by the trappers, and now neither the men nor the horses were in a fit condition to follow, even though but a few seconds had elapsed. Bill Stevens was almost fainting from his wound, so that he was in no condition for a ride, while the left arm of Bitiny Fox hung powerless by his side.

"Where is Waving Plume?" asked Howell, casting his eye over those who stood around him.

This question was not to be easily answered, for that person was nowhere to be seen.

"He must hev followed 'em," replied some one; and this was all that could be said of him.

Lost in the distance, a single man among a score, he had followed the Blackfeet, determined to rescue the Major's daughter or die. Thinking of this put new iron into the strong arms of the trappers; the determination that the consultants came to can be guessed. Pursuit, stern—not ceasing till the aim was accomplished, even though it led them into their very villages.

Bill Stevens, much against his wishes, was left behind, and Major Robison was to take his rifle, as he was unarmed; it would be of no use to Stevens—it was a weapon to be depended upon—and one of the guns of a fallen foe would serve all the purposes for which the wounded trapper would wish to use it.

When, at the expiration of ten minutes, the little band rode away in quest of Tom Rutter and his savage auxiliaries, it was with a cheer, and a firm knitting of the muscles of the brow, which told of stern resolution and untiring determination. Though the light was but uncertain, yet, so broad and deep was the trail that it was easily to be followed, and the seven kept on at the best rate of speed that could be got out of their horses.

Seconds glided into minutes, minutes lengthened into hours, the moon rode high up in the heavens, and the night trod hard upon the heels of day, but still there came no sight of the fugitives.

CHAPTER IV.

IMPRISONED IN THE FREE TRAPPERS' PASS.

Tom Rutter was well acquainted with every inch of the country over which he had determined to travel. He was now striking for a spot which he judged to be most suitable for him under the present circumstances, and which he also, with some reason, judged to be a sure retreat, for the time, at least. Though perhaps it would have been his best policy to have moved on immediately to the regular hunting-grounds of the tribe, yet, for several reasons, did he prefer to linger in this vicinity. The detachment which had separated from him, and which was to form a junction at the river, had not yet made its appearance, and until it did he did not feel justified in leaving. He was not afraid of immediate pursuit by the trappers, and would much prefer letting some of the Blackfeet braves arrive at their village before him. Then it would be apparent that he was a deserter rather than a prisoner, one who, encumbered as he was by a prisoner, nevertheless remained behind till the last shot was fired. Therefore it was that he turned the horses' heads toward the mountains, appearing to Adele as though he were determined to ride, at a racing speed, straight up their rugged sides.

Gradually an opening became evident—a rough, seldom-travelled, and almost impracticable pass—apparently extending through into the Oregonian territory, on the other side.

Man and beast being so well acquainted with the route, the rate of speed was scarcely diminished. On either side towered the mountain, the almost perpendicular walls covered with draperies of green at the top, where the moonlight fell; but lower down, dark and chill. Eyesight could be of little avail here, without a thorough knowledge of the place and its surroundings.

And still, as Rutter clattered on, an answering noise from behind, as it were an

echo, showed that the pursuer held his own. A dark smile swept over the blood-smear'd face of the renegade, as he listened to the noise.

"Come on, come on, close behind. Ye come fast, but it may be a long time afore ye take the back trail at such a rate. 'Them as comes in at Free Trappers' Pass sometimes gits passed out. We're safe here; but that's more than him behind kin say."

In order to prevent Adele from leaping down, and endeavouring to escape in darkness, Tom changed his position so that she could not make the attempt at dismounting without leaping straight into his arms. There was little necessity for this movement. Had it been light he could have seen that no such thought entered the brain of the young captive. She only clung tightly in her seat, and, in breathless suspense, awaited the end.

For half-a-mile, at least, the two horses plunged on through the dimness, and then, at a slight touch on the bridles, they turned to one side, and began ascending an inclined plain, which led along the wall of the pass.

"Steady, gal," said Tom, in a coarse, thick whisper. "Be keerful how yer move now, for two feet out of the road might break that purty neck o' yours. A stumble over these rocks is an ugly thing, and Tom Rutter's work would all go for nothin' if you got it."

For a second the idea of self-destruction flashed through Adele's mind. What so easy as to fling herself away over the rocks, and at once put an end to her troubles, and to life itself? Friendless and alone, in the power of an outlawed desperado, with but little hope of succour, why should she longer live?

It was but for a second. Far behind, from the darkness, echoed the sound of a horse's hoof striking against a stone—she was not entirely deserted—friends yet sought her; rescue might be near at hand. Why, then, despond? The steeds ceased their upward motion. For the present their journey was at an end.

Apparently proceeding from the solid rock, a stout, squat-figured man emerged, bearing in his hand a small lantern. He glanced at the two a moment; then, in a hard, dry voice:

"So yer comin' back to the nest once more, Tom Rutter; and you bring a purty bird along. Come in, and I'll put the hosses away."

"Shade that light, will yer, if yer don't want a ball to come up here, 'Thar's somebody comin' through the pass that's lookin' for somethin' he's lost, and if he catches sight o' that glim, there may be an extra job put out that I don't keer about havin' a hand in."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the man with the lantern, as he put the slide down. "Ho, ho! somebody looking for a lost thing in Free Trappers' Pass! 'There's lots o' them things goes in, but powerful few goes out. 'What's he lost, Tom? A bit calico, or a back load o' pelts, or a money purse? Them's bad things to loose on the prairie or mountains, but nice to find, most mighty nice, most—"

Here his words became indistinct, for he had entered a fissure in the rocks; but something very like an oath emphasized the concluding sentence. Tom Rutter and Adele followed.

The light from the lantern, which was now permitted to stream forth, was but barely sufficient to give the captive some idea of where she was.

The air felt damp and cave-like to her, and, looking around, Adele saw, as, indeed, she expected to see, that the place was part of a cavern, of how great an extent it was impossible to say. The man who was, for the time being, porter, led the horses to one side, and then returned to where Rutter was standing.

"Come on, Tom; we have the kennel all to ourselves to-night. All the boys are out, an' if Big Dick don't come back, we'll hev a nice evenin' of it. Strike into the room, an' tell us whar you come from, how you got that bloody face, and whar you picked up that young squaw. I ain't seen a face for three or four days, an' am splittin' for somebody to talk to."

The renegade did not appear to be in a very loquacious humour, but he followed the advice of the man inasmuch that he "struck" into the room, to all appear-

ance only too glad to find that the place was not tenanted by the usual dwellers therein.

The underground retreat was of considerable size. The room in which they all three finally occupied was at least twenty feet square; the one through which they had passed was much longer, while a curtain of skins did not entirely conceal the passage to other rooms farther on. An air of rude hospitality was visible on Tom Rutter's face, and in his talk and actions, as he motioned Adele to a seat.

"Take a seat, gal, an' don't be skeered. No one is goin' to hurt ye, and yer wants'll be pervided for as long as this here hand kin hold a rifle. It's only a necessary o' war that makes me do this, an' I'll take care that no hurt comes to ye, though I won't say how soon or how long you'll stay in the camps o' the Blackfeet; that's somethin' I ain't got the say about."

Adele sunk on the pile of skins pointed out by the renegade.

One thing only somewhat reassured her. Tom had treated her with more deference than she could by any means have expected, and, somehow, there was an air of honesty about him, when he assured her of support and protection that was almost satisfactory to her, and which caused the other man to open his eyes, as though astonished to see anything like honour in a renegade, and sometime denizen of Free Trappers' Pass.

In his rough way, Tom intimated, if she desired it, some refreshment would be prepared; but Adele shook her head in the negative.

"I s'pose yer sleepy, then, and so just follow me, and I'll show you whar you may turn in."

Mechanically the girl obeyed Rutter, and followed him through the curtained aperture. A short, narrow passage led into another apartment, somewhat smaller than the one they had just left. Strange it was, yet did it seem to her that the air was too dry for an underground room, and it was almost impossible to realize that it was not part of a legitimate dwelling-house.

Placing the lamp—a rude dish containing bear's oil—upon the lid of the chest, Tom, with a few words, intended to quiet and soothe the feelings of the unwilling guest, turned and retraced his steps, leaving Adele alone in the guest-chamber of the outlaws' retreat.

She did not feel at all like sleeping. Her situation was not one which would be apt to act opiatewise on her nerves. Just as the waning light shot up in one last expiring gleam, then disappeared, leaving her in the dark, she heard the sound of voices coming from the front part of the cave. Without any settled reason, she rose from her seat, and groped her way to the entrance of her prison.

Light as the evening breeze touches the fallen leaves and moss carpets of the forest, her feet fell upon the cold earthen floor of the passage. A square of light marked the curtain of the ante-chamber, and here Adele paused. The sound was no longer a hum, but every word of the speakers was uttered with distinctness, so that the listener could understand the conversation fully.

Evidently there was an addition to the number, for there was a voice heard—rough, boisterous, well suited for the utterance of round, rolling oaths. Probably, this man was "Big Dick," spoken of by the porter, as one who might possibly make his appearance before morning. This man was speaking.

"He came so almighty sudden along, and made sich a cussed noise, that I thort he war one of us, a course. To make sure, I hailed him, but he didn't stop, only licked up his hoss, an' come faster than ever. I knowed ef it war any of they boys, the wouldn't be doin' any sich tricks, so I throwed my shootin'-iron up to shoulder, and let drive whar I thort he mout be. The noise stopped most mighty sudden fur a second, and then I heard a hoss gallop away in sich a manner, as said he hadn't any rider aback of him. It war a good shot to make in the dark."

What answer would have been given, was interrupted by the entrance of yet another man, who immediately exclaimed:

"We'll hev to lay low and keep dry for a few hours, my coves, for there's

more'n fifty red-skins hoverin' 'long that way; and they ain't comin' very peaceably, either. They're bound to blaze, from their looks."

"Whar yer from, Bill?" said Big Dick, "an' whar did ye see them red-skins? I've jist been a tellin' how I wiped someone out in the pass, here, but I didn't see anything like Injun signs."

"I war down South Branch, somewhat on the scout; and I see lots of people goin' about, all of 'em with lot of arms and nary plunder, but these red-skins are strikin' fur the pass, strait, an' from the looks of ther top-knots, I should take 'em to be Crows."

"What the — are Crows Injuns doin' up here?" queried Dick.

"On the war trail, I guess."

"Waal, there's no ust a pickin' a fout with 'em, and it's a hard matter to meet with anybody, we don't —, so we kin jist keep under kiver, an' act cautious till they're cleared out."

Adele Robison listened for a short time longer, but finally determined that it was best to retire.

A heavy burden rested upon her young heart. Someone had probably been shot in the pass. That "someone" was doubtless the friend who had so closely followed on after the flight at the crossing of the Marias River.

Who was it?

Her heart grew faint, and her mind dared not suggest an answer. At last sleep came to soothe her wearied brain. It was a calm and quiet sleep, that lasted a long time. At least, so it appeared to Adele when she awoke. In the darkness she lay and wondered where she was, how long she must remain, how it would end.

Tom Rutter's appearance, with refreshments, told her that without the cave it was daylight.

He was very silent. From anything he might say, she could glean no information as to the probable length of her stay in the cavern, and her ultimate destination after having emerged therefrom. She would have asked, concerning the movements of the Indians, whom she had overheard mentioned as approaching on the previous night, but she cared not to confess herself an eaves-dropper. Tom saved her from trouble on that score, by saying, just as he was leaving:

"Keep yer heart up for the next few days. Thar's a consid'erable lot o' Injuns about here, that I don't keer about meetin' jist now. Ef we don't do that, we'll hev to lay down here till they clar out, and there's no sartainty when that'll be."

CHAPTER V.

MEETING OF ARCHER AND PARSONS.

WE need scarcely tell the reader that the horseman at whom Dawson had fired was none other than Waving Plume. As he recklessly urged his horse along the rugged pass, he heard the hail of the outlaw, but thought not of answering it. Then suddenly and furiously did his horse turn, that before he could well understand what had happened, Archer found himself upon the ground in the midst of his whole equipage, while the animal was almost out of hearing.

Confusedly rubbing his head, he was about rising to his feet, when a hand of iron rested upon his shoulder, and a low voice whispered in his ear:

"Keep still, boy, ef yer wants ter come out o' this place with a clean skin. Yer in a heap o' danger."

There was something familiar in the tone which, with the good sense of request, caused him to lie still, and await what this suddenly-introduced friend would have him to do. Silence reigned in the pass. At times he could hear the low breathing of the person by his side; once, for a few moments, he heard the noise of footsteps, as Big Dick sought the entrance of his retreat; but with these exceptions all was still. Perhaps a quarter of an hour had passed ere, becoming impatient, he whispered:

"All is now quiet, what is to be done next?"

"Right, by mighty!" responded the strange friend. "I knowed it war you, Charley Archer—rather an awkward tumble o' yourn, but no bones broke, I suppose. Keep quiet a leetle bit longer, till we kin see ef them as fired that shot is agoin' to deny anything."

The speaker was Jacob Parsons. So soon as Waving Plume recognized him, he felt assured, in his own mind, of the propriety of adopting his advice, so, without wasting a breath in asking him how under heavens he came to be at that spot, when he had supposed him miles away, he retained his crouching position. Of course, this could not continue for ever, though a terrible long half-hour passed before Parsons thought it safe to move. Then, in a whisper, he announced that it was time; and, cautioning Waving Plume to keep close behind, he cautiously moved away, carrying his rifle in readiness for instant use, and scarce making a breath of noise, as he flitted ghost-like through the dusky night.

After three quarters of an hour's fatiguing march, with a low "come on," the leader began the ascent of a most difficult path. Up, up they toiled until they reached a long level ledge of rock, and here Parsons and his companion halted. For the present their travels were at an end.

"Now," said Archer, as he wearily threw himself at full length on the rock. "Now, Jake, can you tell me how you here, where we are, and what we are to do?"

"Yer askin' a good deal at once, but, perhaps I kin. You know I've scouted around this part o' the country for quite a time, and livin' alongside the red-skins, I got to learn their ways. Las' night I was nigh thirty miles away, an' right in among 'em. Young Robison and I war on their trail, 'cause the tarnal critters has got the Major an' his darter—which is a cussed sight worse; and that's what I ought to told you at fust."

"Never mind that, I know that part, though you can tell me what's become of Hugh," said Waving Plume.

"He's all right—will make a bully Injun fighter, he will. They were all round him, but we fought our way through, killed a dozen—more or less, an' then clared out. We had to separate, but he kin hold his own candle, so I ain't a bit frightened fur him. When I started in this direction, I jist thought Tom would strike this way—"

"As so he did!" exclaimed Charley Archer, excitedly, leaping to his feet. "It was he that I followed into the pass—he carried with him Adele Robison."

"Yes, yer correct, an' you needn't be alarmed, she ain't fur off, an' we stand a mighty good chance of taking her o' of his fingers."

"Tell me where she is, if you know; and how you expect to rescue her! It will be no easy matter, though it must be done; and I seek for light on it."

"Easy, boy, don't be in a splutter. There's a cave in the rock, as I kinder hinted, and Tom Rutter has holed thar till he seed jist what to do. And now, while I'm thinkin' on it—how in thunder does it come that he breaks in alone with ther gal, an' you come alone following him when he had a party of thirty braves, an' you were with half-a-dozen free trappers? All the rest on both sides ain't wiped out, be they? I'm kinder curious on them points."

Waving Plume gave a succinct account of his adventures in search of the Major's daughter, together with a detailed description of the conflict at the crossing, the flight, and his lone continuance of the pursuit—of the position of Ned Hawkins, the Major, and the rest of the party he was profoundly ignorant, nor could he tell what had become of the Blackfeet.

Jake heard the account in silence, reserving his criticisms until it was ended; then he commenced:

"Waal, Tom allers war a sharp 'un to handle, and he got ahead of 'em slightlyally this time. He's a turn-coat on principle, you see, and had been a-livin' among the Injuns ever since that time the black rascals foted him up a standin'. He don't seem to be doin' the square thing to the Major an' his darter, but as near as I kin come to it he's fooled you an' the red-skins both, an' slipped in here—which ar a mighty bad place for an honest mau or woman. Maybe

you've heard tell o' Free Trappers' Pass—ef you have, this here's the place. Now, I'm sleepy and tired, you perceive, and so will jist dry up an' go to sleep, fur there's plenty o' time to-morrow to tend to all our talkin' and sich like."

Used as he was to the hardships of trapper life, to Jake, there was no need of a bed of down to bring sleep. In a few moments he was cosily esconced in the arms of Morpheus, and the watchful ear of Charles Archer could hear the long-drawn breath which announced his condition.

Gradually the blackness of the surrounding night changed to a leaden grey. Mistily thoughts swarmed through his brain. Then came a blank—Archer, too, was asleep.

Even yet was his dream haunted by a golden-haired girl, who struggled in the arms of a heavily-bearded refugee and countless Indians. The fight at the crossing was to be refought, the hand-to-hand struggle with the renegade, the sudden retreat, the dark intricacies of Free Trappers' Pass, and the hurtling rifle bullet—all once more appeared ere, with the breaking morn, he awoke from his hard couch on the level rock.

With keen eye he studied the windings of the path which he had followed to reach this resting-place; and anxiously he gazed around to make himself acquainted with the topographical intricacies of his retreat. As he was looking down upon the scenery below, Parsons, who had awakened, remarked:

"It's a queer country this, ain't it, now?"

"Yes, Jacob, it is a queer-looking country. This is, in one sense, a safe retreat, also. It would require a more than ordinary set of men to dislodge us by force of arms; but I am afraid it would not take long to starve us out—indeed, as far as I can see, that would be the only plan that could prove successful."

"Don't you be too sure of that. There's a quicker way than that, if it ain't a better one. This wall"—patting with his hand the rocky side of the recess—"looks amazin' thick an' stout, but six or eight good men could have her down in short order."

Seeing the surprise of Archer, Parsons explained as follows:

"You needn't stare so, it's true. If you look sharp, you'll see see this rock's limestun—right about here you'll find lots of it."

Sunlight suddenly stole over the face of Waving Plume, and the joy of his soul beamed out through his keen grey eyes.

"So near," he exclaimed, "nothing save a few inches of rock to separate us—she must and shall be saved! Quick, tell me your plans, that we may at once begin the work, for delays are dangerous!"

To this rather excited speech of Archer's, Parsons coolly responded:

"Don't be in too great a splutter, young man. There's things to be thought on afore we commence to go in. We had better scout around an' see how the country looks, an' then lay our plans accordin'."

Charles assenting, the two together began the descent of the path which served as a stair-case to this high eyrie.

Preferring to leave the difficult duties of scouting to one most thoroughly versed in its mysteries, Waving Plume sought out a comfortable resting-place on which he might seat himself, while Parsons disappeared in the direction of the mouth of the basin, or *cul-de-sac*, in which they were encamped.

Time passed on. At least two hours had elapsed, and yet the trapper did not return.

At length, tired of inactivity, and restless from a mind burdened by so great a duty as the rescue of the fair "Mist on the Mountain," he debated with himself whether he should follow in the footsteps of Jake, and seek the plain, or return to the niche wherein he had passed the night.

Reflecting that in the one case he would be needlessly thrusting himself into danger, and at the same time drawing no nearer to Adele—while in the other he would be closer to the maiden, even if there was no possible means of access to her, he chose to retrace his step.

Out of breath, he reached the spot, and flung himself down much in the same manner as he had done on the night before. Suddenly, behind his head he felt a slight vibration of the rock, and could hear a tapping sound as though someone were, with their knuckles, trying its strength or thickness. With a bound, Waving Plume was on his feet. Circumstanced, as he was, he could not, at once, think what course it was best for him to pursue.

Following the bent of the first impulse which struck him, he drew from his belt the large hunting-knife which he there carried. For a moment he surveyed the seemingly solid wall before him, gave a glance at the edge of his weapon, and then resolutely attacked the only known barrier which lay between him and Adele.

As Waving Plume progressed with his labour, he began to realize how very thin the partition actually was. At a heavy pressure of his hand he could feel it spring inwards, and he marked well the progress that he had made. One more vigorous application of the knife, the point sank into the rock and disappeared. His work, for the time, was almost done.

A hole as big as the palm of his hand testified to the vigour of his proceedings. Anxiously gazing through this, he could see the apartment beyond. A small lamp cast an uncertain light, and almost directly before the aperture a dim shadow loomed up. The shadow was that of a woman.

"Adele!"

In a low, but audible whisper the word floated into the room. Bending down her head, she replied:

"Who is it that speaks?"

"A friend—one who would rescue you—Charles Archer."

"Thank Heaven!"

This, much more in the shape of a fervent prayer than of a reply; then, to Waving Plume:

"If you can aid me, be quick!"

When the three had reached the valley, and were in some manner hidden by the foliage of the trees, a momentary halt was called, and a short consultation was held.

Environed by difficulties, with two companions depending upon his inventive genius for escape from a most unpleasant position, no light breaking upon the dark road which seemed to stretch out before him, Parsons did all but despair. Think as he might, no good would come of it, and so, after some minutes, he said:

"Well, Charley, it ain't no use. We can't git out."

A groan was the only response, so he continued:

"But that ain't no reason why we can't stay in. They say, 'what ain't hid's best hid,' an' we'll try it. There's plenty of room to lay by here, an' ef we can only throw 'em off the scent a leetle, it may work. Jist come along now."

Diving right into the thick underbrush, Parsons led the way, until they came to the side of the basin which they were in. Here, in a clump of evergreens, he placed them, and then began to retrace his footsteps, first charging them not to move until they heard from him.

As he returned to the spring, he effaced, as much as possible, the marks of the passage of himself and friend.

Stepping lightly into the open space at the spring, he looked carefully around. Nothing unusual met his eye, nor did any suspicious sound fall upon his ear.

"Strange, ther' ain't no sound from 'em yit," was his muttered cogitation. "Tom Rutter must hev got most cussedly careless since he got among the Black-feet, or he'd hev missed the girl afore this. It ain't so likely neither; but there'll be somethin' up soon."

While thinking thus, Jacob was adjusting the saddle of his steed. With a bound he had vaulted into his seat, but scarcely had he settled there, when, from the rocks above him, in the direction of Free Trappers' Cave, came a wild yell.

Drawing in a long breath, he gave vent to an answering cry, so loud and clear,

as even to astonish himself. A moment, horse and rider stood motionless, then, with a renewed cheer, he dashed boldly and at full speed toward the mouth of the basin and the plain.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTURE OF JAKE PARSONS.

The yell which had come to the ears of Jake Parsons, was sounded from the lips of Tom Rutter.

"Quick! Follow them! Don't stand here idle. Your lives depend on it."

Such were the exclamations which Rutter gave vent to; and the man by his side gradually dispensed with the sneer on his face, as he began to understand fully how matters were.

To turn around, to leave the apartment, to call upon the two men who were in the other room, to mount their steeds and descend into the pass, all this was the work of but a few moments.

When, at length, they burst out upon the plain, the first sight that met their eye was a band of some twenty Blackfeet. It was that part of Tom Rutter's party which had not been at the fray of the great crossing. The sudden appearance of the four would have immediately attracted their attention, had it not been otherwise engaged.

Parsons had made somewhat of a mistake in his calculations. It had been his intention to keep close to the mountains, and make a trail running southward. If he could do this, and at the same time keep out of sight of Tom Rutter and the free trappers, he might make them believe that Adele was with him, and by drawing off their attention and forces in this direction, Waving Plume and the Major's daughter might possibly have a chance to escape. The nature of the place was favourable to the plan, and, had it not been for the Indians, it might have been successful.

Unfortunately they were half a mile closer than he expected them to be, and as he rode out through the narrow, rocky, bush-sheltered passage, he fell, as it were, right into their hands. With a loud whoop, he clapped heels to his horse's side, and endeavoured to dodge past them, but in vain. One of those nearest to him, and who was armed with a rifle, drew sight on the luckless trapper. Without waiting to ascertain whether the fleeing man was friend or foe, he pulled the trigger and fired.

Though the ball missed its intended mark, nevertheless it took fatal effect upon the horse which Jake bestrode, and, with one prodigious leap, its vital energies were expended. Though it fell so suddenly, its rider was not to be caught unprepared. Leaping nimbly aside, he avoided being crushed, and with steady aim covered the Indian who had fired the shot. He, knowing his almost certain fate, attempted to throw himself behind his horse, but his motion was not quick enough. A sharp crack, a whistling bullet, and the steed was avenged. To turn and rush toward the cover of the woods was his next move, and, with a score of red-skins, and the four whites to spur him on, he made the tallest kind of running.

A perfect storm of bullets and arrows was launched at him, but still was he unharmed. A number of the Blackfeet dismounted, and closed in upon him; but the hardy white disdained to yield.

Drawing his heavy rifle over his shoulder, he anticipated their attack by leaping upon them. For a few moments there was a lively time among the party, but numbers and resolution were too much for resolution alone, and Jake was finally borne to the ground. Even then he did not, at once, give in, but made most frantic efforts to draw his knife. At length, after a most desperate fight, he was bound, though not without the assistance of Big Dick and Tom Rutter.

"Thar, darn yer ornary picturs, you've got me; but ye had a good time adoin' it. See what yer'll make of me, ye low-lived, red-skinned devils!"

To this exclamation of Parsons, which showed that his mind was not under control, if his body was, no immediate attention was paid, Tom Rutter, all panting with his exertions, exclaiming:

"Whar is the gal—ye?"

CHAPTER VII.

PARSONS AND ARCHER IN THE BLACKFOOT VILLAGE.

It was evening. In the centre of the Blackfoot village were two men well known to the reader—Parsons and his friend, Charles Archer. Without the lodge, could be heard the cat-like pace of a sentinel. At a few rods distance a long wigwam, the council-chamber of the Charred Stick section of the tribe, was located, and now and then a wild shriek, pealed forth by some brave, would reach the ears of the prisoners. Within, nothing was to be heard save the measured breathing of the two; both were sleeping.

The face of Waving Plume was very pale. From under a tight bandage upon his forehead, drops of blood, now clotted, had escaped; the hair on the front part of his head was matted together, and the appearance of the man gave evidence that he had not become a captive without a determined fight.

Long and clear sounded the death-wail for fallen braves. Though successful in their foray upon the Crows, yet had the expedition, taken as a whole, resulted disastrously to the tribe. At least a dozen braves had fallen, and Talmkah, one of their bravest and boldest chiefs, dangerously, if not mortally wounded, in the abduction of Major Robison and his daughter. Thus, in the band of warriors that night gathered around the council-fire, there were deep mutterings, ominous frowns, sharp, blood-red speeches, and actions which told as loud as words, that the fate of the prisoners would be one both sudden and bloody.

The two slept on. Days of toil and nights of waking had so far exhausted them, that, even with the prospect of soon-approaching death, impending over them, they would calmly woo "tired nature's sweet restorer," and quietly and unbrokenly slumber, while bound, and prisoners in the Blackfoot town. They had slumbered perhaps an hour or so, when the entrance of three men into the hut aroused them. Two were Indians, but, by the light of the torch which one of them carried, to them, suddenly awakening, the third seemed to be a white man. Then, as the fumes of sleep rolled off, Charles Archer recognized one whom, of all others, he less wished to meet—Robison himself.

The Major, a weary, soul-drepressed look upon his face, looked around, finally suffering his eye to rest for some seconds upon his fellow-prisoners before recognizing them. Then, as the Indians retired, leaving the three to themselves, he found tongue, addressing them with:

"So we once more meet. For once I am more pained than delighted at seeing a familiar face."

"I can most heartily say the same," was Archer's response.

"Though the explanation of the fact of my being a prisoner here is most easy, I can hardly imagine how you came to fall into the hands of the Blackfeet again, once having been rescued, as I know, by our band of trappers. It can hardly be possible that they, along with you, are sharing the pains of captivity."

"As far as my knowledge extends, they are in perfect safety. I find myself here as much through my own foolishness as through any other reason; yet, knowing, as I do, that I must have been imprudent, I can scarce give a sufficient account as to the means by which I was captured. Excitement, fatigue, grief, darkness and delay must have driven me partially out of my senses, so that I fell into the hands of the very men who were lurking along our trail."

"It is strange," said Waving Plume, "how misfortune seems to dog our every step. Not a move can we make, however fair it may, at the inception, appear, but we are plunged deeper into the mine of difficulties. You, the very embodiment of all caution, just at the critical time, losing presence of mind, seems to be sufficient cause to think that the fates are against us."

And Parsons, too, had a word to say:

"By mighty, Major, things hes a villiany look. I'm expectin' nothin' 'cept the hull darned caboodle on us'll jist be packed in here afore mornin', an' to-morrer they'll make a boufire out o' some seven or eight most cussedly interestin' "

subjects, of our weight an' thickness. What the dence are we goin' to do?"

"We must hope for the best, knowing that while there is life there is hope. I have very little fears, for the present, for Hawkins and the rest of the boys, though I deeply regret that circumstances should have occurred to draw them toward so much danger. They are well-chosen men, with years of experience, and, though game to the back bone, there will be a method about their perseverance which will, as far as possible, preserve them from needless exposure to danger."

CHAPTER VIII.

WAVING PLUME AT LIBERTY.

The night wore on. The sighing winds crept slowly around the wigwam, or sorrowfully wailed up the streets of the Blackfoot village. The dim, ghostly circle around the moon deepened into blackness; dim clouds grew in size, looming forebodingly, and a chill, damp feeling filled the air. Without the wigwam, which served as a prison for Major Robison and his friends, three dusky warrior sentinels stalked, their arms well secured under the folds of their close wrapped blankets. Silence came, like cotton-down, upon the surrounding village, and all was quiet.

From within came no sound indicative of aught of life; but by the light of the low-burned, smouldering brand, three persons held a whispered conversation. It was Waving Plume who first spoke out, and asked his companions to make, at least, one more desperate attempt to escape. It was Waving Plume who first spoke of what all three had before been thinking.

Time hurries on, Major, and the hour of midnight must be well past. To remain here is certain death, and that, too, without having the consolation of knowing that thereby we are in the least benefitting your daughter. Darkness, without, appears to be thick, and guards slacking in their vigilance—what say you, then, to a desperate try for life and liberty?"

"No need to ask me that question, Archer. I have that to nerve me for the struggle which may come; and much of all one loves, hangs trembling in the balance. Here are we, with unbound hands, our lives, and the lives of our friends at stake—the chance of success, to one of us, at least, tolerable—why then should we delay. Let us hasten to leave."

The step of the sentinels without had ceased. A low murmur of conversation came in from the corner opposite to the door. The men without had seen Jake Parsons and Archer most thoroughly bound, and they had not the slightest suspicion but what Major Robison was in the same predicament. A thought of bad faith from Tom Rutter never crossed their minds. With such subjects as might beguile their savage minds, they kept up their conversation, leaving the tight binding withes which had entwined the wrists of their captives, and the chance of fortune to take care of the prisoners. Thus, in silence, and with lips somewhat quivering, and hearts almost silenced in their beating, the three stole out, all unarmed, save the heavy hunting-knife which Waving Plume carried in his bosom.

Robison and Parsons crept along side by side; but Charles Archer followed some half dozen paces in the rear, covering the retreat, and occupying, as he thought, the post of danger.

A faint sound of pattering feet, following close behind, saluted the ear of Waving Plume, so that, with knife drawn, and in a crouching position, he awaited the nearer approach of the object. It proved to be something which is but rarely met with—a really courageous Indian dog. With only a single bark, with only a low, deep growl, he sprang straight at the neck of Archer.

He, however, on his guard, threw up his left arm to ward off the attack, at the same time striking a powerful blow at the side of the animal. It proved a fatal one, for, with a sound, the mere repetition of his growl, he fell lifeless to the ground; while our hero, withdrawing his steel, turned to follow in the track of his still advancing friends. They, not perceiving that he had stopped, silently continued their journey, leaving their rear guard to stand with his reeking knife

firmly clasped in his hand, perplexedly listening in the endeavour to guess the direction taken by his companions.

In five minutes Archer had extricated himself from the village, had traversed a distance of a hundred yards due west, and had then, with a Westerner's instincts, turned and struck a course almost due south. To the south were friends: to the south help, freedom. But, if to the south lay safety, so, to the south lay danger. Outlying pickets returning bands of warriors, a tangled path—these, and darkness were before him. But death howled behind him, and forward, forward through the night, he pressed.

Hastening on, his teeth firm set, his eyes straining to pierce the darkness, his hand tightly clenching his hunting-knife, there came suddenly to his ears the sound of a rapidly approaching horseman. Not far distant was he, either, and though the danger of halting was almost commensurate with that of proceeding, still he thought it best to halt, and, if possible, escape the notice of the coming foe. For not one moment could he suppose that any but a foe might ride so recklessly in such close proximity to the Indian town.

Halting, then, he threw himself at full length upon the ground, hoping that good fortune and the darkness of the night might once again befriend him. At three yards distance he was invisible; it would be a keen-scented man, indeed, who might detect his presence.

The steed came nearer, the soft ground and tangled prairie grass, deadening the sounds of his approach.

Onward, and still onward the red-man swept.

Suddenly, from the very ground at his feet, arose a form, shadowy and spectral, reaching one arm toward the head of his steed, the other brandished back. Startled, his self-possession most sternly attacked, almost stunned by this ghostly apparition, his hand bore hard on the leathern thong of his bridle, and a twitch of the wrist, tried to turn the horse to one side. But, though the nerves of the rider were steel, not so with the animal he bestrode; and, though coming to a halt so suddenly as to be thrown back upon its haunches, farther than that he refused to do. So, as the hand of the warrior felt for the ready tomahawk, the phantom form gave a bound forward, the next moment, with a sweeping, hissing sound, the knife of Archer went hilt-home to the heart of the red-man.

Possessed, then, of steed and fire-arm, with foes behind and friends before, careless—reckless—of pursuers and pickets, straightforward through the gloom, dashed the escaped prisoner.

Somewhat tired was the steed, but the clouds rifted, the wailing winds sighed more softly, the moon again beamed out bright; and as hours sped on, and were thrown backward by the flying hoofs, the bright auroras tinged the eastern clouds, and John Howell, from his look-out by the foot of a thickly wooded hill, keeping sharp guard while his companions slept, caught glimpse of a strange figure, mounted on a foam flecked and weary steed, bearing down full and hard upon him. So, too, with Antonio, the half-breed, who, with the Crows following in his footsteps, had pushed on, and had, on the previous day, overtaken the trappers. He and Howell, together watching, descried the unknown figure, and, at first were somewhat ruffled in their minds, but at length, with a joyous clap of the hand upon his thigh, Howell shouted:

“Waving Plume, by mighty!”

CHAPTER IX.

ATTACK ON THE BLACKFOOT VILLAGE—RESCUE OF THE PRISONERS.

Somewhat cleared was the weather, and morning dawned with a great red flame in the east.

Waving Plume, had, after a few minutes of rest, asked the other trappers their opinion as to what had best be done. There followed, then, somewhat of a difference of opinion; some being for immediate action, some for a night attack, while one or two others thought it would be best to approach to the very outskirts of the town, during that night, and then, when day had fairly dawned, to rush in.

These being so much in the minority, with that stubbornness so common to mankind, held their opinions so stoutly, that they won over to their side, first one and then another of their opposers, until, of the white men, Waving Plume was the only man apparently unconvinced.

But to him, there arose some strange fear; and doubting whether his comrades were not making a mistake, he proposed that Antonio, who had hitherto held his peace with most masterly reticence, should give his views on the subject. The half-breed accordingly expressed his opinions.

Some shook their heads thoughtfully, some considered long, yet, finally all admitted the force of Antonio's argument, and as their hasty morning meal was eaten, and the sun well up, it appeared, if they intend to go on at all, that it was time to start.

With caution, they skirted the hills, keeping well in the shade of the friendly cotton-wood, for the most part following the course of a little stream of water, which, almost dry a week ago, was now nearly a river, in silence the little army advanced.

At length, to the advanced guard, Antonio, Biting Fox, and a Crow brave, the wished-for spot came into sight.

When the main body came up, it was halted, while the tree went forward to thoroughly reconnoiter the woods. A strong party had been there that morning, gathering wood, and it took no prophet to tell what that was for.

Silence reigned here now; the woods were empty—evidently all the supplies needed had been obtained, and it was little likely that an invading footstep from the village would then be met with during the remainder of the day. Two of them remained to watch, while the third, the Crow brave, was sent back to state what had been seen, and to bring up the rest.

Once more Antonio offered to attempt an unseen approach to the enemy, to find out their position and employment; and though now the endeavour was one of more difficulty than when he undertook it under cover of darkness, at the camp of the hollow log, yet, with the same self-reliance he proceeded on his way.

Through an opening in the wigwam, he caught sight of the clear space in front of the council-chamber. He saw, too, a crowd there—the old and young, men, women, and children loudly shouting, while from their prison-house was led the two white men—Major Robison and Parsons.

Instantly all doubts were, in his mind, resolved; the time for the sacrifice had arrived, and prompt and decisive action was necessary.

When he was once more in their midst, it did not take long for him to explain the commotion in the village, or to give them a full understanding of its cause.

"To horse!" shouted Waving Plume, in a whisper.

"To horse and forward. No time to lose now in idle calculation. We have already weighed the cost of this our undertaking. There is no one here, I take it, who could hang behind; so forward," and, like an arrow of death, the whole body swept on into the narrow street.

The surprise was complete. Waving Plume and his followers came fiercely, charging home upon them.

Though in the attack the Crows under Antonio confined their attention exclusively to the extermination of their foes, the whites, after the first fire, were content to bend their energies more to the effecting of that for which the expedition, by them, at least, was more particularly undertaken—the rescue of the three prisoners. While Antonio and his men swept on past the stake without heeding what was there transpiring, Waving Plume and his friends there halted.

And it was well they did so. A large Indian, the master of the ceremonies, a great brave, and, as one might say, the chief executioner of that section of the tribe, stood, with hatchet upraised, just as Charles Archer rushed to the rescue. To send a pistol-ball through his brain was the work of but an instant, then, as the great corpse settled, with a noiseless quiver, to the ground, half a dozen hands dashed aside the already burning faggots, and cut the tight-binding cords which encircled the limbs of the captives.

Parsons gave a whoop as he felt the blood once more freely circling through his veins, and the prospect of sudden and horrible death no longer so unwinkingly staring him in the face ; but the Major grasped his son's hand in silence, then turned with anxious eye toward a group of women and children who were ranged in front of the council-house.

"Adele," said he, stretching out his hand ; "is she there?"

But Waving Plume's quick eye had already pierced to where Adele, pale and thoughtful, sat between two squaws, and, followed by Ned Hawkins and Howell, was, in a moment, by her side. She, throwing herself forward, stood leaning with her arms resting upon the pommel of his saddle ; the next minute the strong arms of Archer had lifted her into place in front of him ; a moment more, and she was in the arms of her father.

To the trappers, now that their mission had been accomplished, but little remained to do. The present state of affairs gave little promise of any severe fighting, and with no distinct desire for revenge burning in their bosoms, they neither wished to engage in nor to behold an indiscriminate slaughter, or the more disgusting operation of scalping the dead.

Ned Hawkins now mentioned the place where they had spent the previous night, and was agreed upon to proceed to that spot, and there, for awhile, remain. Meanwhile, conversation in the little party was brisk. All had something to say, and tongues ran fast, though none ran faster than that of the hero of our story, Waving Plume. What all he repeated in a low tone to Adele, we do not intend here to rehearse ; but that it was something interesting, from the way smiles and blushes chased each other over her face, we do not doubt.

CHAPTER X.

THE REALIZATION OF THE DREAM.

We have followed Major Robison and his daughter through some of the stormy scenes in their history, and now are fast approaching the completion of our work.

Though the story told to him by the renegade, on the night when he was urging escape, had much of probability in it, yet, from having had his hopes so often dashed, he feared to place too much confidence in it, or to allow too high expectations to be raised in his breast. For all that, he felt a lingering belief that now, perhaps, his wishes would be realized, and a stern determination to test, to the fullest extent, the truth of the revelation. Then, with Waving Plume and Stevens, and the rest of the trappers, he would journey in search of the since much quoted Pike's Peak.

A journey of a week and they were safely at the fort ; a stay of another week, and then Robison and Archer were travelling back to the hunting-ground of the Crows, there to meet with the remainder of the formidable little band of *voyageurs*, who were to accompany them on their exploring tour.

Days and weeks passed before Adele and her brother, in safe-keeping at the fort, heard from the wanderers. Then, alone, with his arm in a sling, and a deep arrow wound in his back, came Howell. He brought good intelligence, though. The rest of the party were safe, and in good spirits—more, they were successful.

Having brought this intelligence, and having remained a week or so to recruit from the effects of his wounds and the fatigues of a long journey, Howell again mounted his horse, slung on his rifle, looked well to his canteen and provision bag, and turn westward again, leaving Hugh and his sister to watch and hope.

Summer faded away, autumn came, and November's winds were fiercely humming over the plain, when the next intelligence of the absentees was received. One evening, as the sun was dropping behind the far-off mountains, a single horseman was seen approaching, along the westerly trail, to the fort. Hugh and Adele, by chance looking out, saw him coming, and both, at the same time, recognized him. A few moments later and he was clasping their hands, responding to their eager enquiries concerning the remainder of the party.

Successful beyond their highest anticipations, they might be expected on the following day.

The morrow came, and with it Major Robison and his hardy, sun-browned, toil-worn band of attaches; and here, the family reunined, and all the characters safe, we might take leave of the reader, with the assurance that all the greater difficulties which had clung around the pathway of the Major had been surmounted. He had found the secret, and was, even now, a comparatively rich man. In fact, was there nothing more to relate than that they journeyed eastward to spend the winter, and transact some, to him, necessary business, returning again in the spring, to toil through many ensuing months; then perhaps our chronicles would here end. As it is, we shall not linger long before writing the inevitable "finis."

The connection between Robison and Waving Plume had been essentially a financial one. Robison, at one time wealthy, had been involved in ruinous losses by a financial crisis, being left, not only broken in fortune, but heavily in debt. Impelled by various reasons, he sought the western confines of civilization, bringing with him his children, and a few thousands which, being settled on them, he did not feel himself called upon to deliver up to his creditors. Engaging in the fur trade to some extent, having intercourse with trappers, hunters, *voyageurs*, and Indians, he heard much of wandering life and wandering manners. From an old trapper, who, in a not over sober moment, became loquacious, he gathered a few points which determined him to drop his business and search for gold. This was, perhaps, as much on account of his health as anything else—his spirits, and consequently his constitution, being much broken by the tempestuous life-storms through which he had lately passed. Starting out with Ned Hawkins and another, a man well versed in all western mysteries, he had roamed far and wide, hunting and trapping, yet all the time prosecuting his search and his inquiries. Returning to the region of the trading-posts, he there found Charles Archer, a young man of twenty-one or two, with plenty of means, a go-ahead disposition, and who had sought the great west for the sake of life and adventure. Unfolding to him his plans and hopes, the Major had induced him to enter into the formation of a small, but selected company, and to penetrate into the regions lying along the Rocky Mountains. It was this company whom the reader has found introduced in these pages, and for the past three years they had clung well together, traversing all the region thereabouts, and even scouring the Oregon territory, and the streams that flow into the Columbia. These three years of life had made of Archer a perfect adventurer, while they had endeared him to all with whom he had come in contact.

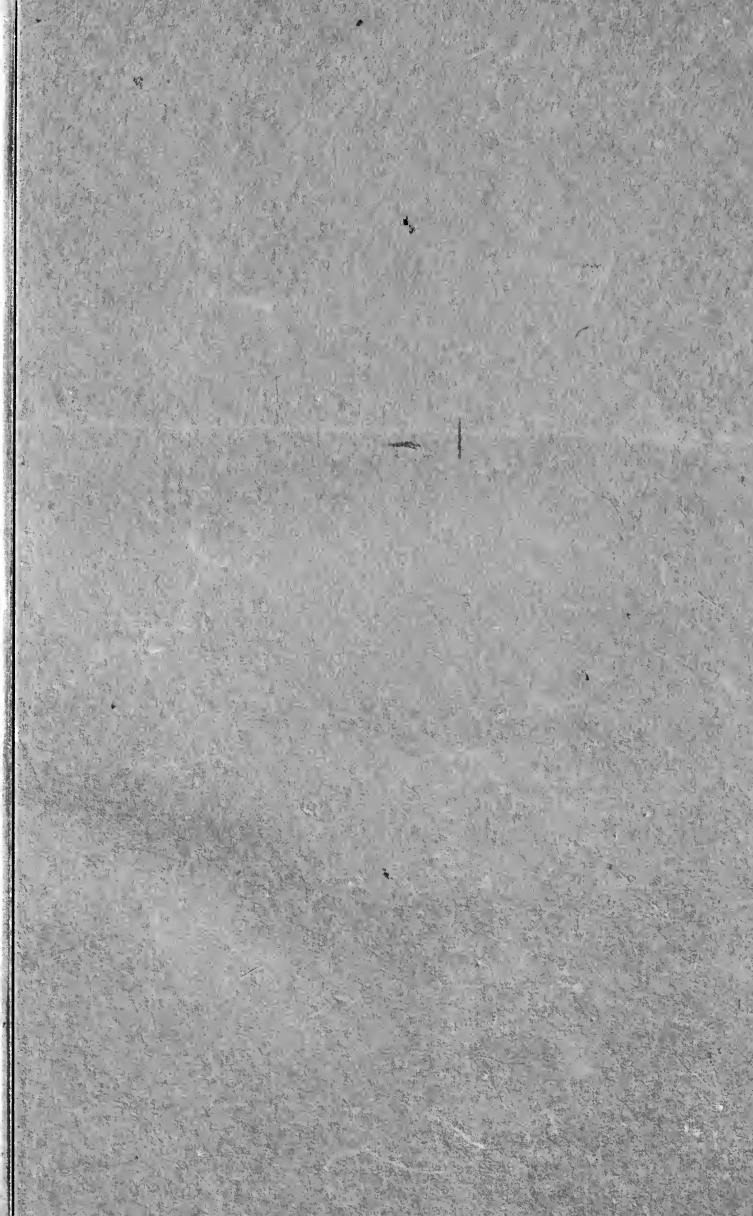
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One evening Adele and Archer stood together, looking through the dim twilight, out over the far-stretching plains. There was a smile on her face, both bright and joyous, for Waving Plume held her hand in his, and whispered into her ear, both low and softly:

"Yes, Adele, I have seen much of the ruder elements of life; I have drained the cup of danger, and lived in an atmosphere of hardship; but shall I not have my reward?"

What more he said we know not, but when her answer came, he printed a kiss upon her ripe, red lips, and then, with his arm twined around her waist, the two stood in the fast-fading twilight of the deep embrasure, whispering of hope and love, and bright days to come.

THE END.



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